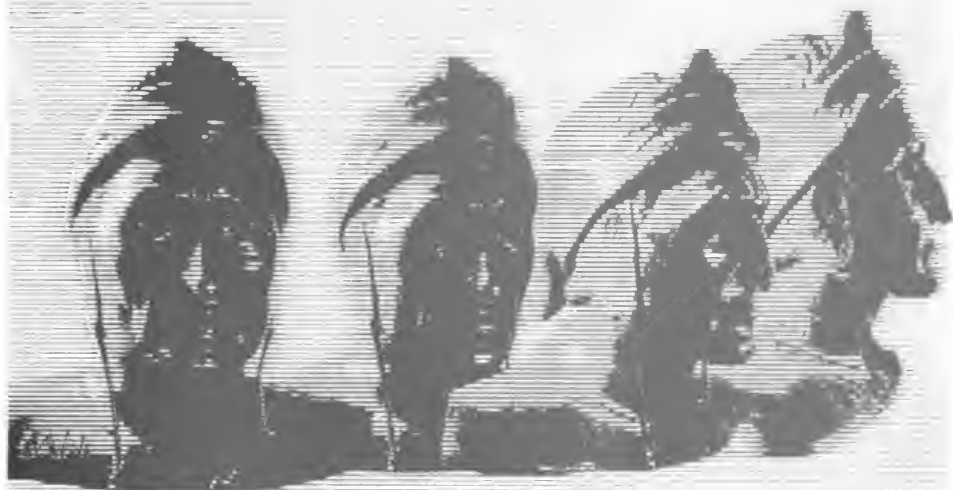


# DANTE T O D A Y



EDITED BY AMILCARE A. IANNUCCI

SPECIAL SPRING & FALL VOLUME

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# **DANTE TODAY**

EDITED BY

AMILCARE A. IANNUCCI

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SPECIAL SPRING AND FALL VOLUME

**QUADERNI d'italianistica**

Volume X. No. 1-2. 1989



Tish Sass. "Dante Steps into the Computer Age."



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# Foreword

When the *Comedy* first appeared, it was what we now call an instant best seller. The literate read it, copied it, and passed it on to friends. Those who couldn't read gathered eagerly in public squares to hear the latest news from the other world. The poem was immediately and widely known, and soon became both an object of study and a source of creative inspiration.

Anyone who attended the centenary celebrations of the Società Dantesca Italiana in November of 1988 must have been struck by how little the situation has changed. As scholars debated fine philological points in the Palazzo Vecchio's magnificent Salone dei Cinquecento, a steady stream of visitors filtered into the foyer to enjoy wicked caricatures of Italian political figures in an exhibit called "La Divina Repubblica: L'Inferno di Giorgio Forattini."

Dante is big business. The exhibit's sponsor, the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, was cashing in on the general population's familiarity with Dante to launch the Florentine edition of the paper. And it worked. Dante has become part of our collective unconscious, with the result that his image is used to sell everything from oil to facsimile machines.

Of all the cultural industries fuelled by literary figures, perhaps only Shakespeare surpasses Dante as a draw. As the bibliography in this volume indicates (it lists over 1500 entries for the 5-year period 1984–1988), this industry is still print-oriented, driven by the lucrative educational market in Italy and North America. The new Zanichelli school edition of *La Divina Commedia*, for instance, sold almost 200,000 copies in its first three years on the market.

But not all of Dante's readers are scholars and students. He also enjoys a large reading public outside academe, as the success of such intelligent but decidedly non-academic books as Roberto Fedi's *E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle* and Giampaolo Dossena's *Storia confidenziale della letteratura italiana: Dalle origini a Dante* shows. First published in 1987, Dossena's entertaining and unorthodox re-

construction of literary history is already into its third printing. And in Holland, a new translation of the *Comedy* quickly sold out its initial print run of 6,000 deluxe copies. Moreover, in the new "orality" of our electronic environment (McLuhan, *Understanding Media*; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*; etc.), Dante is reclaiming his traditional audience of "listeners" through radio, television and other electronic media. On this subject, more in a moment.

How does one explain Dante's enduring popularity, and that of his harsh eschatological masterpiece in particular? The answer, I believe, lies in his poem's distinctive textual characteristics. The *Comedy* is neither an open nor a closed text (Eco, *The Role of the Reader*); it is neither writerly nor readerly (Barthes, *S/Z*). Rather it is more like what Fiske, in *Television Culture*, calls a "producerly" text. A producerly text is polysemous and combines the easy accessibility of the readerly with the complex discursive strategies of the writerly. These peculiar textual qualities allow the poem to produce meaning and pleasure in audiences which run the gamut from the uneducated to the most sophisticated and discerning.

The *Comedy's* uncanny ability to generate meaning derives not so much from its formal, hierarchical allegory as from the allusive density of its literal narrative. Our cover acknowledges the former but also suggests that much of the energy of the text lies in the latter, which Contini refers to as the *Comedy's* "altra polisemia."

Dante's *Comedy* generates a number of possible readings, all of which flow naturally from the literal narrative. In saying this, I do not mean to imply that the *Comedy's* polysemy is boundless and structureless, as some today would argue. Rather the text defines the terrain within which meaning may be made. Where exactly the boundary between a possible reading and an "aberrant" one (Eco) lies is the subject of much theoretical debate. In the world of practical Dante criticism, the problem is not so much "aberrant readings" as not treating the text with sufficient delicacy, of giving undue emphasis to one meaning to the detriment of others packed into Dante's "other polysemy." This is true at both ends of the critical spectrum: erudite and theoretical. But perhaps reductionism is inescapable when one is dealing with a "producerly" text like the *Comedy*.

"The good old text always is a blank for new things." So begins

Peter Greenaway and Tom Phillips' stunning video recreation of *Inferno* 5. And what are some of the most interesting "new things" that Dante has managed to produce in the past few years?

I make no effort here to survey the state of Dante criticism today. Several recent studies have attempted in varying degrees to do precisely that (e.g. Barański, Kleinhenz, Robey, Vallone) and I refer you to them. (Precise bibliographical references may be found in the "Rassegna bibliografica 1984-88"). Rather I shall focus on those "new things" at the edge of scholarship. My list is necessarily partial and personal.

One of the highlights of such a catalogue must be Tom Phillips' engaging "visual commentaries" on the *Inferno*, which often go to the heart of Dante's purpose, exposing the text's subtle metaliterary discourse. At the other end of the readerly-writerly dichotomy are Achille Incerti's illustrations to the *Comedy*, published posthumously last year (1988). Perhaps best described as "existential-naïf," they suggest an almost unmediated sense of identification with the text. With little formal education, Incerti began to paint while recovering from tuberculosis in a sanatorium, and to read Dante shortly thereafter. He executed his paintings with the spectre of death before him, and it shows.

Let us swing back to the "writerly" pole and the staging of the *Comedy* by an avant-garde director, Federico Tiezzi, as an exercise to train young actors. The first installment, *La Commedia dell'Inferno*, was presented last June (1989) in Prato. *Purgatory* and *Paradise* will follow in the next two years. The scriptwriter, Edoardo Sanguineti, has actually written nothing. Rather he has fragmented and rearranged Dante's text, inserting bits of commentary from Boccaccio and Benvenuto, along with occasional citations from other sources from the Provençals to Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. With its plurilinguistic text, chanting delivery of lines, musical effects, and simultaneous action, the production approximates a 14th century oral performance of Dante's poem. The Middle Ages have been made contemporary, a phenomenon which returns me to the new "orality" of our electronic environment, to which I referred earlier.

One of the most significant recent developments in the study and appreciation of Dante has been the attempt (conscious or unconscious) to "retrieve" electronically the aural/oral dimension of his

major work, which had largely disappeared. I am thinking particularly of Vittorio Sermoni's scintillating radio broadcasts of the *Inferno* (the transcripts of which are now available in book form), and the various attempts to translate Dante from print into video, as well as (on the scholarly front) the Dartmouth Dante Project and other lesser attempts to computerize Dante. (The latest edition of the Zanichelli *Commedia* comes equipped with a floppy disk.)

I shall not linger over this subject, since I treat it extensively in my paper. As for the Dartmouth Project, now in operation, it is described by Robert Hollander in the "Note e Rassegne." With a computer, modem, and password, one can access the database in Dartmouth College's central computer, which will eventually hold over 60 commentaries. Time and space contract, and scholarship becomes immediately accessible. Type "[coloro] che la ragion sommettono al talento," and watch the screen fill with commentary, like a page in a medieval manuscript. The two illustrations, "Dante Steps into the Computer Age" and "Dante Produces for TV," commissioned especially for this volume, visually gloss these technological developments.

The new electronic technology is being used not only to retrieve, transmit, and receive meaning, but also to alter the balance in the struggle for meaning. Let us take the situation in American Dante studies, which is certainly the most fluid and interesting at the moment. The struggle for meaning was triggered not so much by the passing of Singleton, who dominated American Dante criticism for thirty years as Croce once dominated the Italian scene, as by the ease and economy with which scholarly communication can be delivered today. Now all the voices that were marginalized by Singleton's dominant discourse can be heard. Many of the initiatives in the field, including the establishment of *lecturae Dantis* series and new specialized journals, come from what was once considered the periphery of Dante studies in America. Any attempt to impose meaning from the centre is doomed to failure. One such attempt—a curious one, to be sure—comes from Harold Bloom in his introduction to his various collections of American Dante essays for Chelsea House. His analysis of American Dante criticism is not so much a "strong misreading" of the situation as a feeble reading of it. But on this subject much will be written: the 1990 issue of *Annali d'italianistica*

will be given over entirely to the theme "Dante and Modern American Criticism."

What about this volume of *Quaderni d'italianistica*? It collects papers on Dante that the journal has accepted over the past couple of years. In keeping with its editorial policy, no critical approach or ideology has been favoured. On the contrary, as editor of this special volume, I have attempted to include as many perspectives as possible. Methodologically, the various papers range from traditional philological and historical research to deconstruction and beyond. They tackle big questions, such as what does the *Comedy* mean and how does it mean what it means, and how was this meaning transmitted and received, as well as smaller issues, such as the interpretation of a single word or verse. But even asking a small question in Dante entails a big effort and often produces important results.

This volume would be incomplete without the contribution of the students in my graduate seminar on Dante at the University of Toronto three years ago. They are entirely responsible for the "Piccola biblioteca" and the "Rassegna bibliografica." Special thanks should go to Laurie Detenbeck, who checked and word processed the bibliography. Others who contributed significantly to the production of this volume are Massimo Ciavolella, Michael Dunleavy, and Susan Iannucci. I would also like to thank the libraries and museums that kindly allowed us to reproduce illustrations from their collections. Finally, I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its continuing financial support of this journal.

Amilcare A. Iannucci

Toronto, November, 1989

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# DANTE TODAY

Edited by  
Amilcare A. Iannucci

Special Spring and Fall Volume

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## Dante, Television, and Education

### Introduction

The entry on television in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, written in the early 1970's, notes that Dante has not been well-served by the medium. The relatively few arid attempts to televise him have met with limited success (Antonucci). This is surprising, since the textual characteristics of Dante's *Divine Comedy* are in many ways similar to those of television. But perhaps this was not as evident then as it is now. (And even now it is probably not evident to everyone.) Whatever the case, this belated realization may, in part, explain the recent interest in "translating" Dante from print into video.

In the past few years there have been three such efforts. A one-hundred part series on the *Divine Comedy*, produced by the Dipartimento Scuola Educazione of RAI TV, was shown in 1988 on prime time. The other two are in various stages of elaboration. Channel Four Television in Britain has a thirty-four part series on the *Inferno* in production. So far only the pilot on *Inferno 5* is complete (1985). Finally, the Media Centre at the University of Toronto has produced two half-hour programmes in its *Dante's Divine Comedy: A Televisual Commentary*. They are "Dante's Ulysses and the Homeric Tradition" (1985) and "Vulcan's Net: Passion and Punishment" (1987). A third programme on "Dante's Universe" is under way, and more are planned. I am involved in the latter enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

Of the three projects, the RAI and the University of Toronto productions are explicitly educational in intention, although the RAI venture also aspires to "avvicinare un largo pubblico a *La Divina Commedia*."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the University of Toronto initiative is not even intended for broadcast: it is designed for the classroom and is directed specifically at North American undergraduate students who are coming to the poem for the first time. By far the most ambitious in scope is the British *A TV Dante*, which carries the signature of a talented avant-garde director, Peter Greenaway.

Tom Phillips, the well-known painter and recent translator and illustrator of the *Inferno*, shares the direction of the pilot programme with Greenaway.<sup>3</sup> In it they attempt, among other things, to translate Dante's plurilinguism (Contini) into the language of television, and, to a great extent, succeed. Their aim is obviously not didactic, not in the institutional sense at any rate, but this programme too could, if properly introduced and contextualized, be used effectively in the classroom.

Is this legitimate? Is it appropriate to use television to teach a literary text? If it is, then why is it? How can television be used? In what way can it be integrated into an overall pedagogical strategy? I limit the following discussion to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the three television projects mentioned above.

### Dante's Audience Then

In his *Life of Dante*, Boccaccio recounts the following anecdote:

[Dante's] complexion was dark, and his hair and beard, thick, black, and crisp; and his countenance always sad and thoughtful. And thus it happened one day in Verona . . . that, as he passed before a doorway where several women were sitting, one of them said to the others . . . "Do you see the man who goes down into hell and returns when he pleases, and brings back news of those who are below?" To which one of the others naively answered, "Indeed, what you say must be true; don't you see how his beard is crisped and his colour darkened by the heat and smoke down there?" (42-43)

Even when Boccaccio puts on the robes of the biographer or commentator, he remains a teller of tales. The story is probably apocryphal, but it confirms what we know from other sources about the early diffusion of Dante's poem and the audiences to which it appealed.<sup>4</sup>

Dante's *Comedy* was, in its time, what today we would call an instant best seller. It penetrated all levels of contemporary society. The literate read it, transcribed it, and passed it on to friends—the manuscript tradition assures us of this. This group recognized the poem's greatness immediately and soon elevated it from the rank of a best seller to that of a classic, if one measure of a classic is the amount of critical literature it inspires. Dante had hardly settled into his grave before the first glosses appeared. His sources were tracked

down and listed, and the literal and allegorical meanings of his poem were expounded. No verse was left unremarked. By the end of the fourteenth century, Dante's poem had generated more commentary than Virgil's *Aeneid* had throughout the whole of the Middle Ages. At the same time, those unable to read, like the women of Verona, gathered eagerly in public squares to hear the latest news from the other world. So powerful was their belief in the actual, physical existence of hell, and so persuasive were Dante's words in conjuring up that world, that they accepted fiction as fact.

The popularity of Dante's poem derives from its polysemous nature, which allows it to speak to audiences that are different socially and culturally, as well as historically, from the illiterate to the most educated and pedantic. Built into the poem's allegory are many possible readings, all of which flow naturally from the literal narrative. By this I do not mean to imply that the *Comedy's* polysemy is boundless and structureless. The text delineates the terrain within which meanings may be made. In terms of the text's intentionality, the women of Verona's decoding is not "aberrant,"<sup>5</sup> nor is their reading as "naive" as Boccaccio would suggest.<sup>6</sup> They are highly competent decoders of oral modes of communication, if not sophisticated "readers." Within the context of an oral performance of the *Comedy*, they would bring to the poem a knowledge of the imagery with which it is constructed and an understanding of its textual conventions sufficient to make sense of it and derive pleasure from the experience. That is why—Boccaccio tells us—Dante was not displeased by their reaction. He realized that, by taking his words as literal truth, they had grasped the poem's ethical and didactic message, which is "to remove the living from a state of misery in this life and to guide them to a state of [eternal] happiness." Indeed, Dante had written his *Comedy* in Italian rather than Latin, and in a simple style rather than a complex one, "so that even women [i.e. the illiterate] would understand it" (*Epistle* 13).

### Dante and Oral Culture

The *Comedy's* distinctive textual characteristics were in part derived from and inserted into a popular culture in which orality played an important role. And, indeed, the poem possesses many of the qualities, listed by Fiske and Hartley, typical of oral modes of com-

munication: dramatic, episodic, mosaic, dynamic, active, concrete, social, metaphorical, rhetorical, dialectical.<sup>7</sup> To these we must add its "memorability," the ease with which sections of it can be learnt by heart and recited aloud, as well as the sense of "nowness" it creates. The oral reception of the poem in segments engenders the feeling of an "unwritten" text, of a poem *in fieri* where the next episode has yet to happen. Moreover, the predominance of contemporary characters and situations enhances this impression of "nowness." Dante meets Francesca, not Iseult or Dido: Francesca—bourgeois, Italian, contemporary. A series of "distances"—social, spatial, and temporal—are thus removed. The text seems unmediated; the experience is immediate. Think of the gossip this must have fuelled among the women of Verona and the speculation about whom Dante would encounter when next he descended into hell!

In saying this, I do not intend to diminish in any way the *Comedy's* status as a textual object. Dante's poem also possesses, in one way or another, all the formal characteristics of literate communication,<sup>8</sup> which are in tension with those of the opposing oral mode. Moreover, in it Dante speaks as a scribe and a maker of texts and consistently addresses the reader, not the listener (Auerbach, Spitzer, Russo). The literary nature of the *Comedy* is so evident and has been so thoroughly studied that to dwell on it is almost superfluous. Unlike such anonymous poems as *Beowulf*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and the *Cid*, which grew out of primarily oral cultures (Zumthor), Dante's *Comedy* was the product of a self-conscious poet writing in a sophisticated urban society which boasted a significant reading public. However, it is equally true, as Ahern points out in "Singing the Book," that "the literate culture of the Italian communes contained a very high residue of orality" and that a majority of the population was either illiterate or only marginally literate (21). That Dante does not wish to exclude this group from enjoying his poem and profiting from it is confirmed not only by the passage cited above from the *Letter to Cangrande* but also by the linguistic texture of the poem itself.<sup>9</sup> For instance, the fact that Dante wrote the poem in the vernacular, in a relatively simple style, in a frequently sung meter, and in easily performable units of approximately 140 verses, argues that he wanted to reach a wide audience, including even the illiterate.

For Dante, the women of Verona's oral reception of the poem and

response to it may be incomplete but not inappropriate nor invalid. A more complete response would involve a twofold reception (either simultaneous or consecutive) by the literate, in which the poem's aural reality would be experienced along with a slow, reflexive reading of the text. Dante's listening public, or at least a large, intelligent group within it, soon realized that it did not possess the necessary competence to give the poem the full response it demanded. Perhaps this explains why in 1373 a group of semi-literate persons (referred to as "non gramatici" in the extant document) petitioned the Florentine authorities for a public reading of and commentary on the *Divine Comedy*.<sup>10</sup> So began the *lectura Dantis* tradition, inaugurated by Boccaccio himself. But from the outset the form became a literate vehicle for academic closure: learned words engulfed the *Comedy*'s many voices.<sup>11</sup> It is this commentary tradition, reinforced by Gutenberg, which has prevailed. But the poem owes its continuing popularity not so much to the *lectura Dantis* tradition as to the ease with which it can be inserted into oral culture, from which it originally sprang. Moreover, it could be argued that a part of its meaning can best be grasped through oral performance rather than through silent, solitary reading.

Walter Ong, citing Havelock, distinguishes the production of meaning and pleasure in oral culture as opposed to literate culture:

. . . for an oral culture, learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known (Havelock 1963, pp. 145–46) . . . Writing separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for "objectivity," in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing. (45–46)

The fact that Dante's poem possesses characteristics of both oral and literate modes of communication allows it to elicit both responses, depending on how it is received and the cultural preparation of the group receiving it. In other words, the *Divine Comedy* opens itself up equally to the immediate, empathetic response of the women of Verona and the more objective, disengaged response of the individual reader. In the first case, the aural impact of Dante's verbal imagery collapses the distinction between the fictional world being described and reality, and establishes a close relationship between the audience and the thing evoked. Here, meaning is produced through identification with and participation in the action of the poem and is grasped

without reflection. Even the moral significance at the heart of Dante's purpose is communicated immediately, since it flows naturally from the literal images, which are part of the known, i.e. part of the cultural consciousness and memory of even the women of Verona. However, in the struggle for meaning (and how this meaning is to be produced and transmitted), the women of Verona's immediate literal "reading" lost out to the more abstract, stratified, allegorical discourse of the literate. In the process, the aural/oral dimension of the poem and much of what Contini calls the *Comedy's* "altra polisemia," i.e. the allusive density of the literal level,<sup>12</sup> have been lost.

### Dante's Audience Today

Dante's audience is as varied today as it was when the *Divine Comedy* first appeared, cutting across class divisions and national boundaries. Moreover, it continues to enjoy a large public, selling hundreds of thousands of copies a year worldwide.<sup>13</sup> A significant portion of this public is made up of students who typically are required to read the poem in a heavily annotated edition, in other words, as a classic rather than as a best seller. Mediation is necessary, of course. Seven hundred years separate us from the world of Dante's poem. We are no longer in touch with its language, iconography, and cultural assumptions, with its political, theological, mythological, and literary allusions. How can this context, necessary for the production of meaning—meaning, to be precise, which is not aberrant—best be recreated? With an old text, the production of meaning must take into account and be respectful of both our and the text's differing historical situations.

In fine, what form should the mediation take, especially for North American undergraduate students reading the *Divine Comedy* for the first time? Is the *lectura Dantis* the most appropriate form? Another anecdote, this one true! In the main undergraduate course on Dante at the University of Toronto a few years ago, the Sapegno edition of the *Comedy* was prescribed. However, we quickly discovered that the students were having more difficulty negotiating Sapegno's learned notes than deciphering Dante's naked verses. The following year we adopted Grandgent's less encumbering edition. The issue is not, of course, the quality of Sapegno's gloss. Despite its age—the first edition appeared in 1955—it remains one of the most sophisticated



and intelligent commentaries on the market. Rather it is the linguistic and cultural preparation of our students, as well as which strategy to use as a first approach to the poem.<sup>14</sup>

### Dante, Television, and Education

Perhaps a pedagogical strategy which is more sensitive to our students' historical and geographical situation and that of the text, for that matter, is in order. Let us start with the text. The *Comedy* is neither an open nor a closed text (Eco, *The Role of the Reader*); it is neither writerly nor readerly (Barthes). An open or writerly text, at least as Eco and Barthes originally theorized it, is multiple, difficult, and self-reflexive, designed for the refined reader who delights in discovering its complex discursive strategies and consequently in participating in a writerly way in the production of meaning. On the other hand, a closed or readerly text is one which "reads" easily and thus has wide popular appeal. It seems to function at one level only—that of reality—and uses standard signifying practices to convey this impression. Although the *Comedy* exhibits many of the qualities of an open or writerly text, it also "reads" easily and succeeds in communicating meaning and giving pleasure even to those unable to appreciate the nature of its elaborate allegorical discourse. Because of this, Dante's *Comedy* is more like what Fiske calls, with specific reference to television, a "producerly text." "A producerly text," Fiske states, adapting Barthes' terminology, "combines the televisual characteristics of a writerly text with the easy accessibility of the readerly" (95). The problem, of course, is that the "readerly" aspect of Dante's text has become less accessible, for the reasons listed above. Moreover, the text is presented to students in a quintessentially literate and academic form—the *lectura Dantis*. This format disregards, to a great extent, both the nature of the text's polysemy and the "reading" competence of a large part of Dante's audience, both then and now.

Most undergraduate students today, like the women of Verona, are highly competent decoders of oral modes of communication. Indeed, they are perhaps more television-literate than book-literate, and able, therefore, if pointed in the right direction, to retrieve in part the aural/oral dimension (largely lost) of Dante's poem, something that simply reading the poem aloud can no longer hope to do. As

McLuhan and others since him (Ong, Schwartz, Fiske, etc.) have shown, television is primarily an auditory-based medium.<sup>15</sup> Watching television, the eye functions like an ear, or, to put it in the more colourful language of a nine-year-old child in Hodge and Tripp's research project on children and television: "You sorta listen with your eyes" (41). Through television, it may be possible to recover not only some of the *Divine Comedy's* contents (its iconography, for instance), but also to re-experience, in part, at any rate, the mode in which the poem was received by a large segment of its original audience.

I keep saying "in part" because the orality produced by today's electronic society is essentially different from the traditional kind in that it is based on and derived from literacy. Walter Ong calls it "secondary orality":

With telephone, radio, television and various kinds of sound tape, electronic technology has brought us into the age of "secondary orality." This new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas. But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print, which are essential for the manufacture and operation of the equipment and for its use as well. (136)

Although I have stressed the similarities between the "reading" competence of the women of Verona and today's students, it is also important to note the differences, lest we abuse Dante, television, and our students. Although it may be true that, culturally and intellectually, the great majority of today's students are formed more by television than by books, they can read, and many even derive pleasure from the act. In the last analysis, therefore, they are closer to Dante's literate contemporaries than they are to the women of Verona: the possibility of a twofold reception of the poem is open to them. However, unlike the *litterati* of Dante's time, they are not hostile to the oral mode (in its new electronic form, of course). This places today's students in a unique position to apprehend and to appreciate the *Comedy's* complex polysemy, both the "altra polisemia" of the literal level and the more formal, structured polysemy of the extraliteral senses. The former, I believe, can best be grasped through the new orality of today's electronic media, television in particular.

## Dante on Television

So far I have concentrated my attention on how, through a deliberate and self-conscious use of television, it may be possible, in theory, to recreate in some measure an experience of the poem which promotes the production of those meanings contained in the text's allusive literal narrative. Whether or not this is achieved, however, depends on how effectively the medium is used. In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan noted that "merely to put the present classroom on TV would be like putting movies on TV. The result would be a hybrid that is neither" (289). I shall now turn to the three television projects mentioned earlier and briefly discuss each.

### 1. *The Lectura Dantis Televised*

Despite the big budget, the RAI production is unsatisfactory both as an educational tool and as a commercial venture. (One of the declared intentions of the undertaking, as I have already noted, was to make Dante accessible to as wide an audience as possible.) It is bookish television: in sum, little more than a *lectura Dantis* televised. Directed by Marco Parodi, each canto is introduced by Giorgio Petrocchi, the project's academic co-ordinator, and then read by a famous actor (Albertazzi, Sbraglia, Salerno). Finally, a commentary is provided in an artificially constructed dialogue between two established scholars (e.g. Baldelli, Borsellino, Pasquazi, Petrocchi, Tartaro, Vallone). The interpretative readings are too theatrical for the medium; the commentary is basic, but still too learned for the intended audience. Its presentation is both awkward and uninspired. Furthermore, the introduction and debate are set in the magnificent Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome, which accentuates the distinctly academic tone of the affair, and serves, of course, to distance its audience even further. The production is sensitive neither to the language of television nor to the telepotential language of Dante's *Comedy*. As a classroom aid, it can be used to impart information and little more: however, the information could be conveyed better through the more traditional pedagogical genre of the formal lecture, with a few slides thrown in. RAI has put the book on TV: the result is a hybrid that is neither.<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 1. The Castle of Memory in a manuscript of *Li Bestiaires d'amours*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. fr. 1951, f. 1 (French, early 14th cent.).



Fig. 2. Dante and his poem. Fresco by Domenico di Michelino in Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence (1465).



Fig. 3. View of Florence. Detail from the "Madonna della Misericordia" fresco in the Orfanotrofio del Bigallo, Florence (1352).

## ♦ LVNA ♦



a luna al nauigar molto conforta  
 Et in pescare et neçciare et caccia  
 Anni i fuor figliuoli apre la porta  
 Et anche al solassare che ad altri piace :

Fig. 4. Luna and her influence. *De sphaera*. Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Ms. lat. 209 (Italian, 15th cent.).

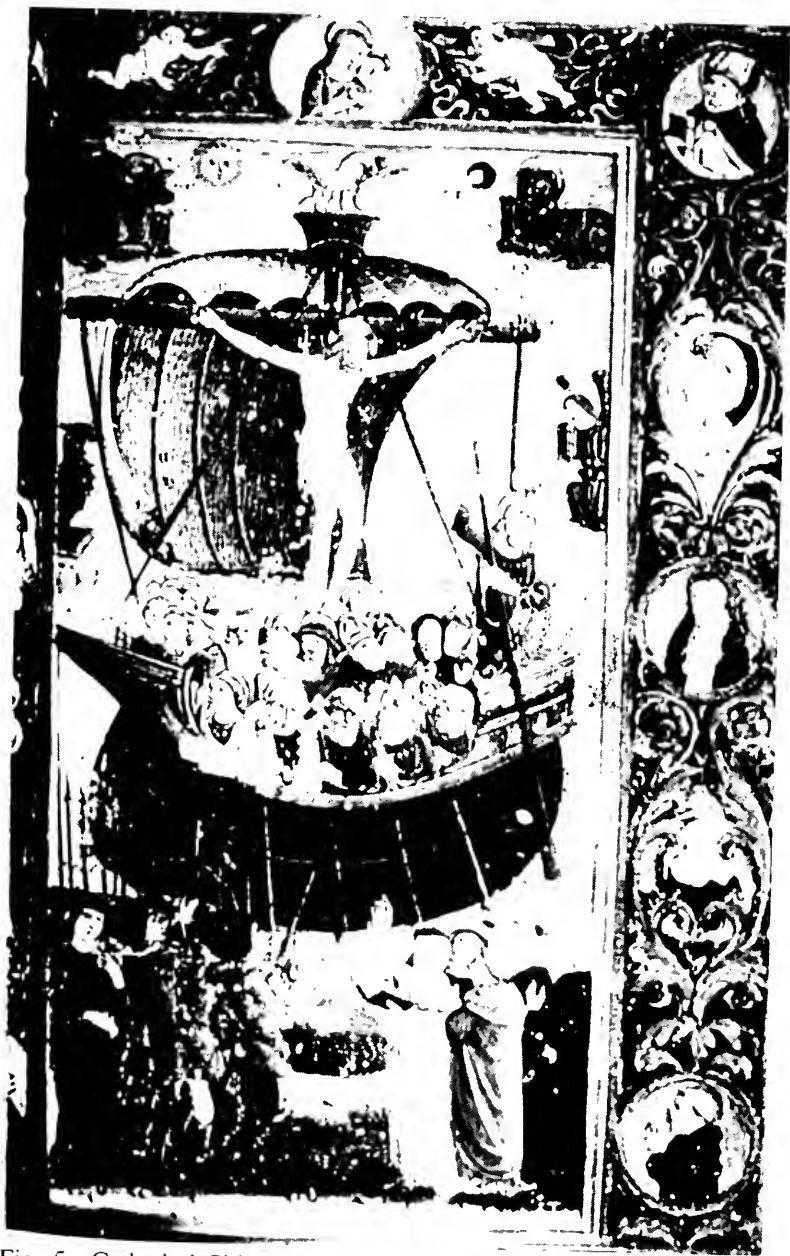


Fig. 5. Cathedral Ship. New York, Pierpont Morgan Ms. M. 799, f. 234v (Italian, 15th cent.).





Fig. 6. *Purgatorio* 2. The ship of the souls. Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. Stroz. 152, f. 31v (Florentine, ca. 1335–1345).

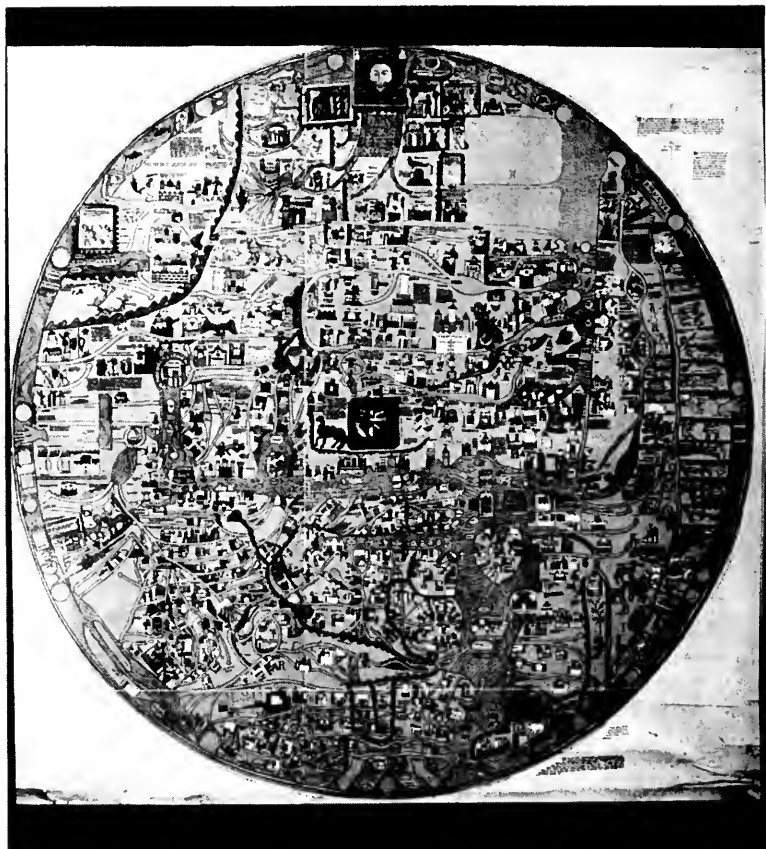


Fig. 7. World map. Ebstorf, Germany. Destroyed 1943 (ca. 1235).

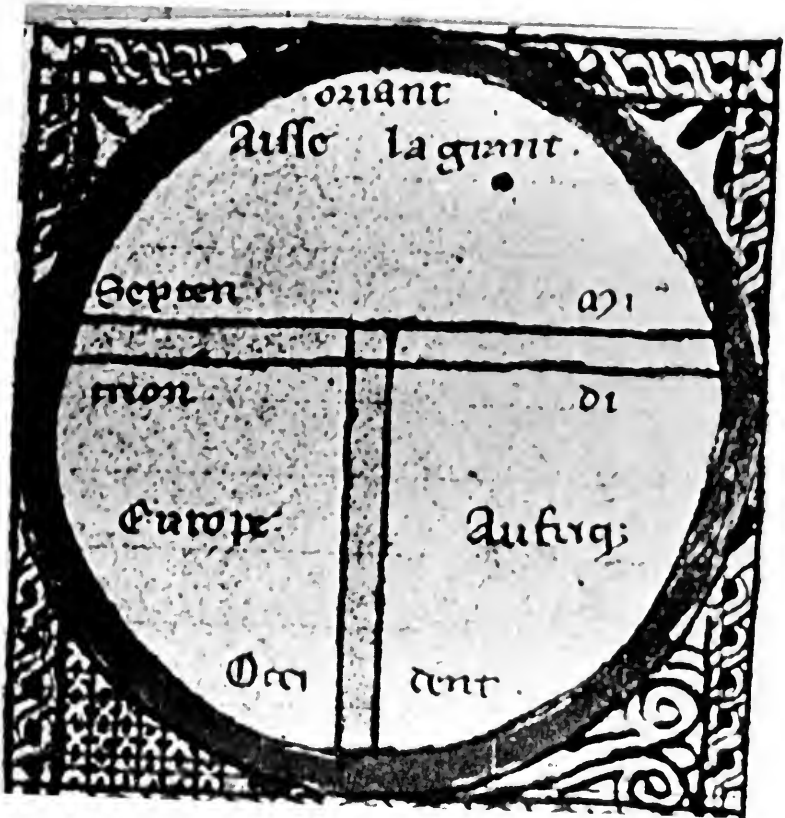


Fig. 8. T-O map in a manuscript of Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce 319, f. iii of contents table (Italian, early 14th cent.).



Fig. 9. God shows Death to the fallen Adam and Eve in a manuscript of St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. Paris, Bibliothèque Ste Geneviève (French, 15th cent.).

## 2. Dante, from Illumination to Television

A remarkable illumination in an early fourteenth century manuscript of Richard de Fournival's *Li Bestiaires d'amours* shows Lady Memory standing before a castle with two doors, one bearing the image of an eye, the other that of an ear (figure 1). One can enter the house of Memory, Richard explains, either through the door of sight (painting) or through the door of hearing (speech):

For when one sees a story painted, whether a story of Troy or of some other thing, one sees the deeds of the brave men who were there in past times as if they were present. And so it is with speech. For when one hears a tale read, one perceives the wondrous deeds as if one were to see them taking place. And since what is past is made present by those two means, that is by painting and speech, therefore it is clear that by these two things one can come to remembrance.<sup>17</sup>

Painting and speech not only generate images in the mind, but also retrieve images already stored there.

Dante's iconography of damnation and salvation, familiar to his first audiences, has today largely been lost. Following a process similar to the one described by Richard de Fournival, the University of Toronto project attempts to reconstruct televisually this iconography, which Dante's powerful verbal imagery would trigger in the minds of his contemporaries. It does so using manuscript illuminations and various other visual images, all of which, even those from late sources, belong to Dante's and his original public's cultural patrimony and memory. Manuscript illuminations have been privileged because they are small—the Italian term for illumination is, in fact, *miniatura*—flat, and often ill-defined, all characteristics which make them ideally suited to television, with its small screen and relatively low definition. The TV image, and especially one thus delineated, flattens, foreshortens, and blurs distinctions, creating the impression of simultaneous presence in a manner akin to that of oral-manuscript culture.<sup>18</sup>

The primary purpose of the University of Toronto Dante video series is, therefore, to reposition the student historically in a pre-humanistic setting and make him self-conscious of the process, so that the visual and oral contexts of the *Comedy* may be critically re-experienced. The historical repositioning I propose corresponds to the following operation. First, the student is removed from in front of

Domenico di Michelino's famous representation of Dante (1456) in Santa Maria del Fiore (Florence). This well-known painting, which has become synonymous with Dante, shows the poet in the foreground holding his *Comedy* open in his hand, its pages facing the viewer. The left foreground and the background are occupied by the three realms of the afterlife; to the right is a view of Florence dominated by Brunelleschi's majestic cupola (figure 2). Once the student has been deprived of this anachronistic perspective, he is offered in its place the crowded confusion of the splendid, foreshortened representation of Florence in the "Madonna della Misericordia" fresco (1352) in the Orfanotrofio del Bigallo in Florence (figure 3). In this manner the three-dimensional "visual" space of the Renaissance is replaced by the flat, "acoustic" space of the Middle Ages (McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy* 19), which our new electronic environment, to a great extent, recreates.

The technique used to make the programmes is straightforward: the images (mostly miniatures, as already indicated) are projected onto one or more screens, filmed, and then edited in order to create the illusion of motion and to construct a coherent narrative and commentary. The script is read by a professional narrator who does not appear on screen. Finally, original music is added. The perspective and imagery thus reclaimed are used to illustrate key aspects of Dante's poem, whether they be thematic, structural, or other.

Most of the images are necessary to recreate the context and the narrative. Some of the context-building illustrations are taken from illuminated manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy*. However, these manuscripts yield relatively few images, since Dante's early illustrators rarely dedicated more than one or two miniatures to each canto. Furthermore, illuminations from this source, with a few notable exceptions, seldom take us below the surface of the text (Brieger, Meiss, and Singleton in *Illuminated Manuscripts*). In other words, these pictures can often provide the *divisione* but seldom the *ragionata cagione*, to use Dante's own critical categories. On the other hand, there are some images, deriving from a variety of sources, which serve a precise, exegetical function, clarifying especially the "altra polisemia" of the literal narrative. I shall use the Ulysses programme, the first in the series (1985), as an example. Consider the image of the moon in *Inferno* 26, usually interpreted in terms of the

poem's formal allegory, i.e. as a symbol of Reason, unilluminated by Grace. However, the traditional iconography of the goddess Luna suggests other, more allusive, interpretative possibilities which obviously have some bearing on the episode's significance. Luna was the protector of sailors and patron of folly. She was also closely associated with Fortune, and hence tragic reversal. Indeed, she is often represented as balanced on wheels, as she is in a fifteenth century illustration from the *De sphaera* which we used in the programme (despite its late source) because of its beauty and clarity (figure 4).

Less often, an image can illuminate the more formal, structured polysemy of Dante's text. The Cathedral Ship (figure 5), driven by Christ's passion, is almost certainly the model for the angel-propelled ship (figure 6) which transports the saved from the mouth of the Tiber to the shores of Mount Purgatory.<sup>19</sup> Since the Cathedral Ship is in turn modelled on Noah's Ark, a clear iconographic and typological link is established between Noah's Ark, the Cathedral Ship, the celestial boat of *Purgatorio* 2, and Dante's ship, for that matter, metaphorically the poem itself. All four carry a similar cargo: the saved. Perhaps the most obvious image of this sort in the Ulysses programme is the thirteenth century Ebstorf *mappa mundi* (figure 7), in which the figure of Christ is actually superimposed on the known world, divided according to the familiar T and O pattern (figure 8).<sup>20</sup> In this symbolic space, Christ's feet are placed at Gibraltar. The meaning is evident, and dramatically brings into focus the Ulysses' episode's dominant metaphor. To be saved, one must stay within the bounds. Spiritual limits are defined in geographical terms. The Pillars of Hercules stand as an imperative: do not overstep the bounds! Ulysses does: he follows the setting sun, symbol of Adam's fall, sails into darkness, and ends in shipwreck. At the tropological level, Ulysses' example warns Dante's Christian audience of the perils of spiritual transgression.<sup>21</sup>

Although much of this information could be delivered in an illustrated lecture, televisual presentation of the material adds considerably to the way meaning is produced and grasped. Words and pictures are only part of the meaning-generating strategy in these televisual commentaries. A complex series of other factors also generate meaning: these range from the angle and motion of the camera to the tone of the narrator's voice, from the graphics to the sound

track. For example, music contributes significantly to the production of meaning. The Ulysses programme is, among other things, an account of various "sea" journeys. It starts by contrasting the circular pattern of the homeward-bound Homeric hero to the linear trajectory of Dante's Ulysses. The latter's last, doomed voyage is then compared to the successful journeys of Aeneas, the purgatorial souls, and Dante himself. Each has its music. For instance, the musical themes of the two Ulysses emphasize their differing destinies: one creates a sense of closure, the other of opening, but an opening which suggests from the outset the inevitability of shipwreck. In contrast, the celestial ship of *Purgatorio* 2 sails to the steady militaristic beat of a motif which recalls *In exitu Israel de Aegypto*.

The other televisual commentaries in the series are similarly fashioned. "Vulcan's Net: Passion and Punishment" (1987) retells the story of Paolo and Francesca, setting it against the broader theme of love and war. Its archetype is traced to the adultery of Venus and Mars, called by Ovid "the best-known story in all heaven." Finally, "Dante's Universe" (now in preparation) illustrates how Dante uses the Ptolemaic universe as a structuring device to give his poem shape and meaning. The stage upon which his *Comedy* unfolds is the cosmos.

### 3. *A Postmodern TV Dante*

The British *A TV Dante's* pilot on *Inferno* 5 is less philological than the University of Toronto programmes, and takes the opposite approach, making the past contemporary: "The good old text always is a blank for new things." So begins the Greenaway-Phillips metavideo, which deliberately sets out to bring the writerly aspects of Dante's text into the open, skilfully using it to experiment, at times parodically, with the "linguistic" conventions of the medium. The result is an entertaining, postmodern collage of televisual styles, an exercise which is not dissimilar in spirit to Dante's conscious mixing of styles or plurilinguism in the episode.

In *Inferno* 5 we move from the low grotesque style of the Minos sequence to a realistic description of the infernal storm to an epic catalogue of famous lovers, and finally, in the Francesca part of the episode, from the language of the *dolce stil nuovo* to the more realistic language of prose romance (Poggioli), all within the frame



of chronicle. How do Greenaway and Phillips handle these shifts in style? They translate them into contemporary filmic or televisual equivalents. They use Fellinesque imagery for Minos and the sinners, a televised weather warning about an approaching tornado in the southern USA for the *bufera infernale*, and the distinctive, snapshot style of British television documentaries for the epic catalogue. Then, in the Francesca segment, they play with the conventions of romance, repeating, for instance, Francesca's crucial "Lancelot" speech three times, each in a different tone.

The first part of the programme, until the whirlwind dies down and the two condemned lovers step forward, moves at feverish speed. We are bombarded by hundreds of repulsive sounds and images, held together by quick cuts. Moreover, the screen is often broken up, thus multiplying the infernal imagery and reinforcing the overwhelming sense of moral disorder and chaos. Through these and other televisual techniques, Greenaway and Phillips manage to restore to the episode's setting and *contrapasso* a rawness which time and commentary had largely subdued.

While today's students might be shocked by the raw and explicit imagery, they would certainly appreciate the hectic pace of the programme. Televisually literate, they regularly practise the art of "zapping" or "systematic switching" (Palmer 79), which allows them to construct a viewing experience of fragments. This video might even make them aware that Dante does something very similar with the stylistic codes of his time, which he juxtaposes and fuses with disarming ease, moving from the grotesque to the sublime and back at will. The Greenaway-Phillips video contains a number of other insights into the workings of Dante's text, which are expressed not only through the rapid accumulation of images but also through the techniques of the medium itself: the use of black and white, colour, computer graphics, odd camera angles, sound effects, and so on.

Subtitled THE LUSTFUL, the video opens with a visual word play: LUSTFUL becomes LUST and then US, a nice tropological touch. Sometimes words are so powerful that they cannot be translated into images: they must be rendered in the imagery of the words themselves. When Virgil warns Minos (vv. 22–24) not to obstruct the pilgrims' way, for their journey "is willed where will and power are one," his authorial voice speaks from the pages of a book.

More spectacularly, the word LOVE is literally branded in fire onto the screen each time Francesca utters it in the three famous tercets (v. 100ff.) in which she attempts to justify her adultery with Paolo. Her face fills the screen while flames burn through her skull-like mouth and eye sockets. The scene is disconcerting in its interpretative accuracy: Francesca burns and dies in the fire of illicit passion. The sin becomes the punishment. This idea is brought into dramatic focus, again through the imaginative use of televisual devices in the three versions of Francesca's "Lancelot" speech (v. 121ff.) Through their poses and the colour of the light which bathes them in the first two renditions, Paolo and Francesca convey differing attitudes toward their passion, seemingly out of step with one other. Francesca's tone as she speaks the lines reveals first unconscious passion and then urgent, seductive entreaty as she seeks to embroil the viewer in her own moral downfall. In the background, the silent Paolo conveys internal struggle as Francesca delivers her lines the first time, and then anguished shame as she repeats them. In the second sequence, Francesca, like Paolo, tries to cover her nakedness with her hands. In the final rendition, both are devoid of emotion. The colour has disappeared, and Francesca delivers her lines in a flat, matter-of-fact tone. Repetition turns passion into routine, a commentary on both the nature of lust and the episode's *contrapasso*. The soundtrack underscores the point. From time to time in the background we hear the words "and more and more . . ." The refrain, as it turns out, is part of verse 130, which Tom Phillips translates, "But more and more our eyes were forced to meet."

In the second version of the "Lancelot" speech, the lovers' attempt to cover their nakedness recalls the medieval iconography of the temptation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, Paolo is portrayed throughout as slight and vulnerable, perhaps a reference to the traditional interpretation of Adam's weakness and the Fall as male rationality capitulating to female seduction.<sup>22</sup> The typological link between Paolo and Francesca and Adam and Eve suggested by the lovers' poses is made explicit in the final images of the programme. As Francesca pronounces the famous "Galeotto" passage—"The book was Gallehaut, a go-between"—the camera focuses on her sensuous mouth (the colour has been fully restored) which, with the pilgrim's swoon, is turned

vertically to become a vaginal image and then the V of Eve. Thus the programme begins and ends with a visual play on words—a device which certainly would have pleased Dante, who, as we know, loved puns and word-play.

## Conclusion

I have perhaps overstated the use and usefulness of television in teaching. If I have, it is because television is so often treated as an inferior cultural medium with inferior textual characteristics that its potential both to create “new things” and (more importantly, from our perspective) to illuminate “old things” has been underestimated. Perhaps this is due to literate culture’s uneasiness with television and the new electronic orality in general, which it perceives as a threat to its values. Whatever the case, television can, I believe, be an effective teaching tool, especially if it is integrated into an overall pedagogical strategy, anchored by the more traditional teaching genres of the formal lecture and seminar.<sup>23</sup> For Dante specifically, it can be useful in recreating an experience of the *Comedy* and in recovering certain messages, in particular those contained in the allusive polysemy of the literal narrative. Sometimes it can even help us penetrate the more formal hierarchical polysemy of the allegory. In the hands of sensitive directors like Greenaway and Phillips, the medium can even bring into focus the writerly aspects of the text, exposing Dante’s discursive strategies and metaliterary discourse.

Bringing television and other electronic technology<sup>24</sup> into the classroom is also an important gesture toward the present and our students’ cultural formation. Even today the *Divine Comedy* can be enjoyed as a best seller rather than tolerated as a classic. But for this to happen, we must provide a commentary, at least initially, which does not overwhelm students but provides them with just enough information to produce meaning and pleasure. Peter Greenaway and Tom Phillips incorporate the commentary tradition into their video in a brilliant and parodic way. From time to time windows open up on the screen and an expert appears to explain some detail or other. He is allowed to say only what is absolutely necessary. Then his voice starts to fade; finally the window closes and he disappears. There are symbolically and ironically three such authorial figures: a Dantist, a classicist, and an ornithologist.<sup>25</sup>

One final anecdote to conclude. The Christmas 1988 issue of *Panorama* contained a full-page advertisement for a FAX machine. It proclaimed in bold print: PRENDETE UN LIBRO E TRASMETTETELO SUBITO DOVE VOLETE. The book to be sent was *La Divina Commedia*, complete with an image of Dante figured on one of the open pages. The ad struck my fancy for two reasons: first, that our electronic society associates Dante with the book, which continues to be an object of authority and reverence; and secondly, that this monument of words should be transmitted across telephone wires. It was with this very machine that I transmitted this paper from Rome to you in Toronto today.<sup>26</sup>

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## NOTES

- 1 In addition to writing the scripts, my role is to make sure that the overall conception of each programme is realized. The programmes are produced and directed by Michael Edmunds. They are available through the Media Centre of the University of Toronto in both English and Italian versions.
- 2 Quoted on the cover of Petrocchi, *Per conoscere Dante*, which is an offshoot of the RAI television project. Petrocchi, who co-ordinated the academic side of the undertaking, is even more explicit about its objectives and intended audience in the following statement, cited by Giulia Borgese in an article in the *Corriere Cultura*, which appeared just a few months before the programmes were broadcast: "Speriamo in un largo pubblico, anche di esperti, anche di studenti, a cui con la massima semplicità spiegheremo il contenuto e l'importanza dei singoli canti." The book mentioned above, like the TV project on which it is based, is rather simple and straightforward in concept. It contains a biography of the poet, a brief summary of each canto, and an anthology of ten "famous" cantos with commentary. It is, however, a multimedia affair. It comes with an audiocassette with readings of the ten anthologized cantos by Albertazzi, Sbragia, and Salerno, who performed this task in the television production.
- 3 Phillips' translation is used, as are some of his illustrations. However, it seems that there will be a change in personnel and in look in future programmes. Greenaway, in a recent interview in *La Repubblica* (Porro), speaks of work on a new translation and construction of a set in preparation for the shooting of the series, which will take at least three years to complete. The programmes will not be dramatizations in the strict sense of the word, but will include actors for the major characters (as is the case for Paolo and Francesca in the

already completed *Inferno* 5 segment). The English actor Bob Peck will play Dante; Sir John Gielgud is scheduled to portray Virgil.

- 4 On this subject, see John Ahern, "Singing the Book" and "Binding the Book," but especially the first of these two important articles, in which Ahern divides Dante's audience into four groups according to the degree of each group's "literacy" (21-22). They are 1) the *idiotae* or *illiterati*; 2) the semi-literate or *indocti*; 3) the *volgari e non litterati* (i.e. vernacular literate only); and 4) the *litterati* (i.e. also Latin literate). Since the second group, composed mainly of "unschooled artisans and craftsmen," could "haltingly decipher bills of sale, simple accounts and like documents," it can, for our purposes, be collapsed into the first group of pure illiterates. When it came to a complex written text like the *Comedy*, this group too was, in effect, illiterate: it only had access to the poem through oral recitation. Likewise, the last two groups can be merged into one, since both were capable of reading Italian. These four groups, taken together, included all social classes and related to one another in complex and paradoxical ways. The distinction that concerns me in this paper is that between the illiterate and the literate, i.e. that between those who could only receive the poem orally and those who could, if they chose, receive the poem either through a public oral performance or through a private, silent reading of it. I shall return later in this paper to the complex question of double reception on the part of the literate.
- 5 The term belongs to Umberto Eco who, in "Il pubblico fa male alla televisione?", argues that when there is a significant social or cultural difference between the encoder and the decoder of a text, the decoding will often be "aberrant," i.e. the message will be deciphered according to the cultural codes of the receiver rather than those of the sender. This is especially true of television, given the great social and cultural range of its audience (266). As the *Letter to Cangrande* (*Epistle* 13.10) suggests, and as Ahern argues in "Singing the Book" (32-34), Dante wrote his poem in such a way that it could be received both orally and through silent solitary reading, thus making it accessible to the widest possible audience. This, of course, does not make the *Comedy* immune to aberrant readings, which occur regularly and frequently. However, the women of Verona's "reading" is not of this kind: the message they draw from the poem, at both the literal and the tropological level, is encoded in the text.
- 6 Boccaccio's characterization of their reading competence brings to mind Eco's important distinction in *The Role of the Reader* between the "naive" and the "sophisticated" Model Reader. Although the women of Verona most resemble Eco's "naive" Model Reader, this category does not entirely explain their situation, since they are very competent decoders of oral communication and the messages that this mode of communication privileges. For Eco's application of his Model Reader theory to television (which is our special concern in this paper), see "L'innovazione nel seriale" (135).
- 7 The only characteristic of oral communication listed by them that Dante's

poem does not possess in any measure is the "ephemeral," since the *Comedy* is obviously a written document, also intended to be received by a sophisticated reading public (Fiske and Hartley 124-25).

- 8 These are, always according to Fiske and Hartley, narrative, sequential, linear, static, artefact, abstract, permanent, individual, metonymic, logical, univocal/'consistent' (124-25).
- 9 Indirect confirmation comes from the reaction of the *litterati* of his day, like Giovanni del Virgilio (*Eclogue* 1.6-13) and later of the humanists, starting with Petrarch himself, who criticized Dante for writing the poem in such a way as to appeal to the "ignorant mob" (*Familiars* 21.15).
- 10 For the text of the petition, see Isidoro del Lungo 163-69. Cf. Vallone, Ahern, "Singing the Book" 33.
- 11 The experience, according to Boccaccio's own testimony in the four sonnets (*Rime* 1a Parte, 122-25) dedicated to his public reading of the poem, was not a completely satisfactory one. The form was too academic for his public, which he refers to as "questi ingrati meccanici" (123.13). Those who had criticized Boccaccio for opening up the poem to the "vulgo indegno" (123.3) had nothing to worry about. The *lectura Dantis* format, despite its longstanding tradition, is fundamentally antithetical to oral communication, with the paradoxical result that it has to a great extent excluded the very group which gave rise to it.
- 12 The women of Verona's literal "reading" must be located within the range of the *Comedy*'s "altra polisemia," which, of course, contains a great deal more since it is the product of "la fulminante ricchezza della memoria dell'autore, in cui esperienze e letture si stratificano e accumulano, facendo sí che gli elementi vicini e assai spesso i medesimi, siano punti di numerosi reticolati e sistemi, per solito implicati e non svolti" (119). "Tal copia associativa," Contini goes on to say in one of the most penetrating pages of his *Un'idea di Dante*, "è fomentata da quella che culturalmente è la duplice natura di Dante, preziosa e 'comica'" (120). But commentary on the literal level of Dante's poem (not to mention the allegorical levels) "si è tradizionalmente svolto secondo la linea puntualmente erudita spettante cosí al prezioso come al 'comico'" (120). Because of this erudite focus, we may add, the aural/oral component of the allusive literal level has been left largely unexplored.
- 13 Just a few statistics to indicate the continuing popularity of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The new Zanichelli school edition of the *Comedy*, prepared by Tommaso Di Salvo, sold 180,000 copies in the three year period 1985-87, and this in a highly competitive market in which the Sapegno (La Nuova Italia) and Bosco-Reggio (Le Monnier) editions held their own. Perhaps even more significant is that the new Pasquini-Quaglio edition of the poem (Garzanti), which is intended primarily not for the schools but for the general public, sold over 30,000 copies during roughly the same period (Borgese). Dante sells well abroad too, as several papers at the recent international conference on "L'opera di Dante nel mondo: edizioni e traduzioni nel Novecento," organized by the Centro Bibliografico Dantesco (Roma 27-29 aprile 1989), indicated.

- 14 For second or subsequent approaches to the *Comedy*, whether in the context of a senior undergraduate seminar or at the graduate level, an annotated scholarly edition like Sapegno's is not only preferable but necessary. However, in this paper I am concerned rather with the student's first contact with Dante's poem, which in North America usually occurs in the junior years of university.
- 15 For the eye/ear dichotomy, see *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, later applied to television in *Understanding Media*. See also the recently published *Laws of the Media*, which elaborates the distinction further. This posthumous book was reconstructed by McLuhan's son Eric, using his father's notes. For a reassessment of McLuhan's seminal work on media, see the essays in De Kerckhove and Iannucci's *McLuhan e la metamorfosi dell'uomo*.
- 16 My negative assessment of the RAI production is shared by most Italian Dante scholars and television commentators. See, for example, Beniamino Placido's entertaining review in *La Repubblica*.
- 17 I use the translation of Kolve, who studies the passage and the miniature in *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative* (24–26). For the original, see Segre's critical edition of *Li Bestiaires d'amours* (5).
- 18 The manuscript culture of Dante's time, as Chaytor, McLuhan (*Gutenberg Galaxy*), and others have noted, was still intensely oral in nature. It was common for manuscripts to be read aloud. But more important for our purpose, the manuscript page, in contrast to print with its bold intensity and uniform precision, lacks visual definition. It has a diffuse texture and cluttered appearance, often containing text, gloss, and image simultaneously.
- 19 The illustration of the Cathedral Ship (figure 5) is taken from a fifteenth-century Italian manuscript (New York, Pierpont Morgan Ms. M. 799, f. 234v). Therefore, this picture, too, is later than Dante's poem. However, the iconography (Kolve 297–358), of course, is much older. It was chosen because it actually represents the Ship of the Church being driven (metaphorically) by the crucified Christ who hangs on the mast. This striking image recalls Ulysses tied to the mast in the famous siren episode of the *Odyssey*. The correspondence led some early Christian allegorists to see Ulysses as a Christ-figure. (To Dante he was a figure more of the first than of the second Adam.) The illustration also brings into focus the cross-like posture of the angelic helmsman in *Purgatorio* 2 (figure 6), which none of Dante's illuminators shows explicitly (Brieger 2: 332–35).
- 20 The Ebstorf map is a rather elaborate version of the T and O map (from *orbis terrarum*), common in Dante's time and familiar to him. Oriented with east at the top, the "O" traces the boundary of the known world, which is concentrated entirely in the northern hemisphere. The encircling ocean covers the southern hemisphere of water. The "T" inscribed in the "O" divides the known world symbolically into three continents, as the example (figure 8) taken from a manuscript of Brunetto Latini's *Tresor* clearly shows. The creator of the enormous Ebstorf map, destroyed during World War II, was likely Gervase of Tilbury (Bagrow 48–50), an English professor of canon law

- in Bologna. The Ebstorf map probably resembles the illustration (now lost) in the manuscript of Gervase's *Otia Imperialia* (written in 1211).
- 21 For a more complete scholarly treatment of some of these ideas, see my "Ulysses' 'folle volo': The Burden of History," revised Italian version in *Forma ed evento* 145-88.
  - 22 Some of the ideas developed in the video are already suggested in Phillips' illustrations to *Inferno* 5 and commentary on them (288-89). One of these is precisely the Eve-Francesca typology, which has long been a commonplace in Dante criticism. However, his illustration is based on Michelangelo's representation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel of the temptation and expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, in which the traditional iconography is greatly obscured by the bold, contorted movement of Michelangelo's corpulent figures. The video Paolo and Francesca seem to have been inspired more by Northern European Renaissance painting: the various Adams and Eves of Lucas Cranach, for instance, which more faithfully preserve the medieval iconography than Michelangelo's resplendent nudes on the Sistine ceiling. Figure 9 (miniature from a fifteenth century French manuscript of St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei* in the Bibliothèque Ste Geneviève, Paris) provides a "typical" medieval representation. In it God shows Death to the fallen Adam and Eve.
  - 23 I suggested such a strategy in an earlier essay published in the MLA's *Approaches to Teaching Dante's Divine Comedy*.
  - 24 Such as computers, to which there seems to be less resistance. The latest edition of the new Zanichelli *Divina Commedia* for the schools comes equipped with a floppy disk, which contains the text of the poem plus a programme for the rapid search of single words and rhymes. However, by far the most ambitious and elaborate computer project on Dante is "The Dartmouth Dante Project" on the commentary tradition. Now in operation, it is described by Robert Hollander in this volume.
  - 25 The Dantist is the late Kenelm Foster, O.P., of Cambridge University.
  - 26 A much shorter version of this paper was presented (in my absence) at the international conference on "Italian Literature in North America: Pedagogical Strategies" held at York University, Toronto, Canada on March 11-12, 1989.

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## Detheologizing Dante For a "New Formalism" in Dante Studies

In his capital and underutilized "Dante profeta," published in 1941, Bruno Nardi threw down a critical gauntlet, and challenged us to look at the *Commedia* not through a glass darkly, but face to face. He begins where all such discussions must begin, with the *Commedia*'s most overtly prophetic moments, its political prophecies; situating them within the context of Joachimism and Franciscan spiritualism, he moves to a discussion of medieval attitudes toward prophecy, dreams, and divination. Calling to our attention Albert the Great's belief that some people "sognano il vero, e, a differenza di altri, hanno visioni veraci, talchè non di rado pronunziano perfino chiarissime profezie" (368), Nardi claims that Dante considered his own experience one such *visione verace*,<sup>1</sup> with the result that those who view the poem as a literary fiction misread it: "chi considera la visione dantesca e il rapimento del poeta al cielo come finzioni letterarie, travisa il senso" (392). Moreover, Nardi persists in asking the inelegant questions that are the logical consequence of his position, not only "Si deve dunque credere colle donnicciole di Verona, che Dante scendesse davvero all'Inferno, e davvero salisse all'Empireo?" (392), but even "Ma fu veramente un profeta, Dante?" (405). Given that his answer to the first query is a qualified yes ("Non precisamente questo; bensì che Dante credette gli fossero mostrati in visione l'Inferno, il Purgatorio, il Paradiso terrestre, come veramente sono nella realtà" [392]), Nardi's next step is to take on Croce, for whom to admit such a hallucination on Dante's part is to suggest—impossibly—that the lucid poet was a madman.<sup>2</sup> If this is madness, says Nardi, Dante was in good company: "dobbiamo confessare che di demenza è impastata la psicologia religiosa; e dementi furono del pari Mosè, Zarathustra e Maometto, dementi Geremia, Ezechiele e san Paolo, non meno del protomartire Stefano e dell'autore dell'Apocalisse" (396). Faced with the obvious similarity

between Dante's claims and those of previous prophets, Nardi courageously (especially in that he was not an American academic but an Italian ex-priest) vaults the barrier that, by segregating Dante from his precursors, preserves modern believers from the unpalatable necessity of accepting with regard to a medieval poet what they accept from various earlier claimants: namely, authentic divine inspiration. But, if Nardi is more rational than is decorous among believers, he is also more believing than is decorous among rationalists; indeed, the very posing of his final query (to which he offers another qualified assent)<sup>3</sup> may have limited the influence of his essay.

In this essay I will trace, in broad outline, the history of our recent handling of what I take to be the fundamental question for all readers of Dante's poem: How are we to respond to the poet's insistence that he is telling us the truth? Logically prior to this query stands another that we cannot answer, but on which we may speculate: Did Dante himself believe in the literal truth of those things for which he claims literal truth?

In the wake of the American *querelle* regarding the allegory of poets versus the allegory of theologians, we seem to have reached an impasse in which the question of Dante's truth claims has been effectively put to one side, begged by some of us, ignored by others, treated as settled by many. This is not to say that the issue is never raised; in our attempts to understand the *Commedia's* intertextuality, for instance, it is frequently touched upon.<sup>4</sup> But there is no consensus—merely, in North America, an undiscussed and acritical assumption of allegiance to Charles Singleton's beliefs. As to how we have arrived at such an impasse, I believe that a major cause has been the issue, still unresolved, of the authorship of the Epistle to Cangrande. The impasse has been compounded, moreover, by cultural differences that prevent adherents to essentially the same point of view from benefiting from each other's work: it is my belief that Nardi's contributions regarding "Dante profeta" and Singleton's regarding the *Commedia's* use of the allegory of theologians are essentially complementary. Since Singleton's position emphasizes the validity of the literal sense as historically true, and the issue of Dante as *profeta* ultimately goes beyond the specific prophecies within the text to encompass the much larger problem of the poet's view of himself as a teller of truth, these two traditions are in effect parallel

ways of discussing the one central issue of the poet's truth claims. They have not been viewed as such because neither side has been particularly receptive to the other's mode of framing the question. In the United States we have tended to vex the issue of allegory as a mode, genre, or method, evolving a critical discourse regarding the allegory of the *Commedia* that barely refers to the text. Hence the Italian accusation that we are engaged in sterile allegorizing at the expense of the poetry—an ironic response given that our insistence on the allegory of theologians was intended to reinvest the literal sense with a poetic worth denied it by the traditional reading based on the allegory of poets. Nor could it be said that we have given the Nardian position its due: in "Dante *Theologus-Poeta*," Robert Hollander chides those *dantisti* who "have no difficulty in understanding that Dante claims literal truth for his poem, but then go on to make this Dante a 'prophet,' thus avoiding, as did Bruno Nardi, the way in which the poem is rooted in fourfold exegesis in the name of a single aspect of the biblical possibilities" (64–65). Nardi was not so much avoiding anything as he was formulating the issue in terms that were more congenial to one who was less a literary critic than a historian and philosopher, steeped in the thirteenth century controversies between "true prophets" and "false prophets," whether these charges involve Aristotelians or Franciscans. Indeed, if—with respect to Dante's mode of writing—we were to interrogate the *Commedia* as much as we have in the past interrogated the *Convivio* and the Epistle to Cangrande, we would find that Nardi's way of framing the issue of the poet's truth claims is far from inappropriate.

In his later "Il punto sull'Epistola a Cangrande," Nardi moves from stating his case regarding Dante's claims to examining how the poet's claims have traditionally been evaded. In other words, he formulates a theory of evasive reception. Due to its emphasis on reception, and thus on the Trecento commentators—the earliest "recipients" of record—Nardi's theory involves a shift of focus from the *Commedia* to the Epistle to Cangrande. Noting the accusations of heresy that were levelled at Dante, called a vessel of the devil by the Dominican Guido Vernani,<sup>5</sup> and culminating in the Dominican ban of 1335, he points out that all of Dante's early commentators (among whom Nardi places the author of the expository part of the Epistle, a point to which we shall return) feel obliged to protect their poet

from the charge of heresy. Their defense is invariably based on distinguishing the *poeta* from the *theologus*, the literal sense contrived by the poet from the allegorical sense employed by the moralist: "E tutti lo mettono al riparo da questa accusa nello stesso modo, cioè distinguendo quello che Dante scrive come poeta (*poetizans*) da quello che Dante pensa come teologo 'nullius dogmatis expers,' ossia, in sostanza, fra il senso letterale, intenzionalmente svalutato, e il senso allegorico, il solo vero, cioè quello che si cela sotto il velo delle parole fittizie, 'sotto il velame de li versi strani,' come dice Dante stesso in uno dei luoghi del poema veramente allegorici" (27). The early commentators thus deflected attention from the literal sense and its preposterous claims by intentionally devaluing it, equating it with the allegedly fictitious imaginings of the poet. This stratified division of the text's authorial persona along allegorical lines, with the theologian responsible for the allegorical truth that is hidden under the *bella menzogna* of the poet's fanciful inventions, creates a deplorable dichotomy that persists to this day, yielding critics who "pur riconoscendo a Dante la tempra di vero poeta, ne svalutano l'altissima ispirazione religiosa da cui la poesia sgorga" (30). In Nardi's opinion, the disastrous lesson on how to protect the poet by devaluing the literal sense of his poem is first provided by the well-intentioned theologian who, he believes, is responsible for the expository section of the Epistle to Cangrande.

At this point, the parallels between Nardi and Singleton become more evident, as do the ironies inherent in our story. Nardi is as determined a defender of the literal sense of the *Commedia* as is Singleton; like Singleton, he is deeply aware of the significance of the Epistle to Cangrande as a hermeneutic document. But their approach to the document could not be more different. While Singleton grounds his defense of the *Commedia*'s literal sense in an appeal to the Epistle to Cangrande—"The allegory of the *Divine Comedy* is so clearly the 'allegory of theologians' (as the Letter to Cangrande by its example says it is) that one may only wonder at the continuing efforts made to see it as the 'allegory of poets'" (90)—Nardi refuses to acknowledge the Dantesque paternity of much of the Epistle because he believes that it treats the poem's literal sense as mere *fictio*. In this, Nardi took a particularly idiosyncratic stand, since—as Singleton had in fact astutely observed—it was only to be expected



that attacks on the allegory of theologians as the *Commedia*'s dominant mode would take the form of attacks on the authenticity of the Epistle, as indeed proved to be the case.<sup>6</sup> Before turning to the complications caused by Nardi's stand regarding the Epistle, another profound confluence between his ideas and Singleton's should be noted, a confluence that is the logical outcome of their defenses of the poem's literal sense.<sup>7</sup> Nardi's emphasis on the detrimental effects of separating the *theologus* from the *poeta* may surely be considered responsible for the lack of response to his ideas in Italy: Italian *dantismo*'s protectionist attitude toward what it calls the "poetry" is a Crocean legacy, and Croce's reading—motivated by his disgust with deracinated allegorizing—represents in its essence nothing but a willed and consistent application of a method already canonical in Dante studies, to wit the dichotomized *theologus-poeta*. Although he did not lay as great a stress on the evils of this dichotomy as Nardi, Singleton too was aware of it as a problem, and indeed viewed the matter in a Nardian focus that was not passed on to his heirs, who have instead preserved the dichotomy and privileged the *theologus*—precisely as Italian critics, who have done the opposite, have accused them of doing. Thus, Singleton writes that "if we must choose between Dante as theologian and Dante as poet, then, I suppose, we take the poet" (86), adding, à propos "Boccaccio and many others [who] have preferred the theologian": "To see the poet as a 'theologian' is to see him essentially as one who constructs an 'allegory of poets,' hiding under a veil the truths of theology—a view which has a long history in Dante interpretation" (95).

Both symptom and cause of the deadlock we have reached with respect to the issue of Dante's truth claims (a formulation that I prefer, in the interests both of clarity and a more ecumenical approach to Dante studies, to either its allegorical or prophetic precursor) are the acrimony and inflexibility displayed by those who, unwittingly, reflect the old dichotomy in extreme form: as Singleton's heirs dig ever more deeply into the cultural and theological humus from which the *Commedia* grows, they make the poet appear more and more a theologian, unleashing a backlash from those who would have us remember that he is a poet.<sup>8</sup> As a group, we are interested in the *Commedia*'s poetry, meaning its rhetoric and philology, and in its theology, meaning its moral philosophy, aspects of the poem that

we keep resolutely apart; we shy away from the underlying crucible where the two coincide—in a poet who models himself on David, the “humble Psalmist,” who like David composes a *teodia* and speaks as *scriba Dei*, with what he considers a theologically-vested authority.<sup>9</sup> To the extent that we do speak of these matters, we view them not as prerequisites for all investigation of the *Commedia* but as independent strands of Dante studies, devoted to allegory, “profetismo,” apocalyptic literature, mysticism, and the like.<sup>10</sup> Greatly to blame for our critical disarray has been what I consider the “red herring” issue of the Epistle to Cangrande’s paternity. The linking of the Epistle to the issue of the *Commedia*’s mode of signifying has had the unfortunate effect of allowing the question of the Epistle’s authorship to seem decisive for our reading of the poem. This skewing of the critical discourse is implicit in Singleton’s contribution, which gives the impression of being most vulnerable in its reliance on the Epistle, and is explicit in Nardi.

The issue of the Epistle’s authorship has distracted us from the text we are trying to understand and has bred unnecessary confusion. Thus, Nardi’s principal antagonist in the debate over the paternity of the Epistle was Francesco Mazzoni, a scholar who is far from a supporter of the “prophetic” reading of the *Commedia*; it is ironic that Nardi and Mazzoni should respond to the Epistle in the same way, as in no way inimical to the fictitiousness of the poem it glosses. To complicate matters, in “La ‘mirabile visione’ di Dante e l’Epistola a Cangrande,” Giorgio Padoan entered the fray on Mazzoni’s side, in that he undertakes to defend the authenticity of the entire Epistle, but in Nardi’s cause:<sup>11</sup> Nardi denies the authenticity of the second part of the Epistle because he believes that it promotes the idea of the *Commedia* as mere *fictio*; Padoan sustains the Epistle’s authenticity because he believes that exactly the opposite is true, i.e. that the expository part of the Epistle supports the idea of a Dante who intentionally represented his text’s literal sense as true. In contrast to other commentaries on the opening of the *Paradiso*, which respond to the first canto’s audacious patterning of the poet’s ascent on St. Paul’s *raptus*, “whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows,” with cautious appeals to poetic fiction,<sup>12</sup> Padoan points out that the Epistle to Cangrande contains no such disclaimers: “Il fatto essenziale per questo discorso è

che nell'*Epistola*—proprio come abbiamo visto per la *Comedia*—si afferma esplicitamente che non di viaggio metaforico si tratta, né di immaginazione di fantasia, bensì di vera e propria 'elevatio ad coelum' " (43). Even more telling are the authentic biblical visions invoked by the Epistle as models for the *Commedia*, "tre esempi biblici di visioni (ancora una volta) realmente avvenute: 1) il *raptus* al cielo di S. Paolo; 2) la visione che S. Pietro, S. Giacomo e S. Giovanni ebbero della trasfigurazione di Cristo; 3) la visione della gloria di Dio avuta da Ezechiele" (44), examples that in turn are buttressed with references to three authorities on visionary experience, Richard of St. Victor, St. Bernard, and St. Augustine.

Prodding us to confront and openly discuss the issues raised by Nardi, Padoan poses the problem of Dante studies: "Ma questo insistere sulla realtà della visione e questo tono profetico sono essi ad imporsi a Dante per la forza insita nel suo stesso realismo e per la foga della sua appassionata polemica, oppure derivano da una scelta deliberata e consapevole dell'autore, da una sua ben meditata convinzione?" (39). Why is it that this question, articulated more than twenty years ago, whose implications broach representational concerns on the one hand and authorial intentionality on the other, still haunts us today? As I have suggested, one of the reasons that Padoan's compelling arguments have not been able to penetrate and focus critical thought as fully as their author would have wished is their connection to the Epistle; to the extent that his arguments engage the Epistle more than the *Commedia*, and to the extent that they are presented in the context of a defense of the Epistle's Dantesque authorship, they are the more easily shrugged off by those not willing to listen. Moreover, by linking a tangential issue (the Epistle's authorship) to the main issue (the *Commedia*'s mode of signifying) and then blurring the lines between the two, we have allowed the critical waters to become fearfully muddled. A case in point is a recent book by Peter Dronke, in which the author (like Padoan a student of Nardi's) inveighs against the exegetical approach to which we have been giving the label allegory of poets, which he believes ill serves the *Commedia*'s imaginative power.<sup>13</sup> Following Nardi, he argues that Dante's claims are not derisible in their historical context: "the great prophet-visionaries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—Hildegard and Joachim, Mechthild

and Marguerite—made unflinching claims to truth. I believe it is their kind of claim that Dante makes” (127). However, he argues against Dante’s penning of the Epistle, whose author he considers an inept allegorist, and hence against Padoan;<sup>14</sup> moreover, he lumps Singleton and Hollander among that “majority of scholars since Croce [who] have continued to think of the *Commedia* in terms of fiction” (127), an assessment that hardly does justice to their positions or strengthens the cause in which he is fighting. Dronke’s book, which also conflates Dante’s prophetic claims with those of Alanus, without acknowledging that a major tenet of Nardi’s supporters has been the distance between Dante and those poets for whom the literal sense is explicitly less important than the allegorical, illustrates the confusion to which our lack of critical consensus has led.

I suggested earlier that, if we were to interrogate the *Commedia* as we have the *Convivio* or the Epistle, we would find support for both Nardi and Singleton. Any metatextual study of the *Commedia* has to come to terms with the poet as truth-teller, and thus with “Dante profeta” in the larger sense.<sup>15</sup> A further result of a metatextual reading of the *Commedia*—of interrogating the *Commedia* regarding itself—will be to collapse the distinctions between the “allegorical” approach and the “prophetic” approach, by suggesting that, from Dante’s perspective, they amount to the same thing.<sup>16</sup> In other words, what one could call Dante’s prophetic mode corresponds to Singleton’s allegory of theologians or Auerbach’s figural mode. By the same token, I am convinced that the *Commedia*’s imitation of God’s way of writing, in defiance of all theological protocol, does not require the Epistle to Cangrande or any other external document for its substantiation; the poem itself furnishes sufficient and incontrovertible evidence of how it wants to be read. By this I do not mean to say that I find the Epistle uninteresting; for the record, my sense of it is that it is Dante’s. But I do mean to say that its authorship, were the matter one day to be decided against Dante, need not in any way impinge on our reading of the *Commedia*.

The distance between Nardi and Singleton regards not so much their ideas on how the poem intends to be received as their response to the second of my initial queries; with respect to Dante’s view of himself, Singleton presents a less “naive” persona than Nardi, hewing more closely to the Crocean path: “But to attribute to a critical

and reflective Dante the belief that he was another Aeneas or another St. Paul is simply to unload on him our own disinclination to face the myth directly and to understand it" (78). In this matter, I follow the Nardian school of thought, which I believe in fact "faces the myth more directly"; thus, my approval for Singleton's famous formula that "the fiction of the *Divine Comedy* is that it is not a fiction" (62) does not extend to the suggestion that Dante himself thought his poem a fiction. (What Singleton left veiled is elaborated by Hollander, who grafts onto Singleton's perhaps deliberate reticence an ironic poet who "creates a fiction which he pretends to consider not to be literally fictitious, while at the same time contriving to share the knowledge with us that it is precisely fictional" [86].)<sup>17</sup> In my opinion, Dante knowingly used the means of fiction—poetic and narrative strategies—in the service of a vision he believed to be true, thus creating what he defined a "truth that has the face of a lie"—"un ver c'ha faccia di menzogna."<sup>18</sup> This paradoxical label, which accommodates the *menzogna* of art within the framework of an artist whose scribal stature guarantees his work's truth, finds its counterpart in a further paradox that I believe furnishes Dante's definition of his poem: the *Commedia* is a "non falso errore," not a fiction that pretends to be true, but a fiction that IS true. The phrase "nonfalse error," used to describe the ecstatic visions of the terrace of wrath, provides a means to understand Dante's own understanding of his achievement; not polarized as either *theologus* or *poeta*, Dante encompasses the aporias and contradictions of a prophetically inspired poem—a work that as art may be error, but that as prophecy is nonfalse—within the rigorous embrace of paradox.

In sum, I believe we must accept Dante's insistence that he is telling the truth and move on to the consequences. Therefore, although we must address the text's self-presentation as true, we must more fundamentally address the critical consequences of such self-presentation: to wit, the ways in which the text succeeds in presenting itself as true. In other words, the topic at hand is Dante's realism. Although Dante shares with other narrators the concern to authenticate his narrative, his religious pretensions make this concern particularly pressing; for as Morton Bloomfield points out in "Authenticating Realism and the Realism of Chaucer," while discussing the truth claims inherent in all narrative, the "basic problem of all revealed religions

is just this authentication" (343). Bloomfield further notes that this problem is in the minds of the authors of the Bible, where it articulates itself precisely in the terms that Nardi formulated in "Dante profeta": "The end of Chapter 18 of Deuteronomy frankly discusses the problem of how to distinguish true prophecy from false" (344). This is the node at which the problems of discussing the *Commedia* intersect with the problems of discussing all realistic narrative: because of its biblical and prophetic pretensions the *Commedia* poses the basic narrative issue of its truth value in aggravated form. At the same time, however, Dante does not seek to hide the fact that he is crafting the word of God in language; he draws attention to his role as narrator in a multitude of ways, including the celebrated addresses to the reader. It is extremely relevant to our discussion that Auerbach finds in Dante's addresses to the reader the urgency of a prophet; in other words, typically, Dante has used what could have been moments of vulnerability, moments of exposed narrativity, to forge his most authoritative voice. Spitzer rejects Auerbach's insistence on prophecy in favor of a reading that puts the emphasis on mimesis, on the addresses as aids in the reader's visualization and thus in the poet's realism; tellingly, he does not see that Auerbach is able to arrive at his formulation (Dante as a new prophet capable of inventing the essentially new topos of the address to the reader in the service of his prophetic vision) precisely because he had so long been thinking in terms of Dantesque realism, for in Dante the prophetic stance is indissolubly wedded to the poet's concern with achieving supreme mimesis.<sup>19</sup> The formulation Dante-prophet disturbs Spitzer as one who is interested in seeing how the *Commedia* works as art; it does not occur to him that in order to see how it works as art, we have first to accept—not believe!—its prophetic claims on its own terms. Only then can we see the pressures such claims exert upon a poet. One of the great problems of studying Dante is reflected in Spitzer's taking to task of Auerbach: critics, like Nardi and Auerbach, who take the poem's pretensions seriously, are criticized for not seeing an artifact, for believing Dante too much. In fact, they are seeing the artifact most clearly, and are on the road to believing Dante least.

The *Commedia*'s remarkable fusion of absolute certainty about content with self-consciousness about the human artistry that is its

vehicle has continually fostered new variants of the ancient either/or critical stand, variants expressed in the critical language of their day: recently Jesse Gellrich (sounding like a deconstructionist version of Spitzer critiquing Auerbach) has argued against what he calls Singleton's sense of the *Commedia* as myth in favor of its self-consciousness, claiming that "an awareness of illusion making is inevitable" and that the poem "does not protect itself from such awareness but encourages it" (143). In fact, Dante creates a poem in which such encouragements may constitute one of its most effective forms of protection. As with the addresses to the reader, Dante protects himself most when he seems most exposed; he neutralizes the betrayal of self-consciousness implicit in all narrative authenticating devices by making his authenticating devices outrageously inauthentic.<sup>20</sup> Gellrich mistakes Singleton's position in an instructive fashion: he accuses Singleton of really thinking that Dante imitated God's way of writing, of falling for the "myth," while Singleton's position was in fact saying that Dante would have us believe that he imitated God's way of writing. In other words, Gellrich conflates what Singleton himself believes with what Singleton says that Dante wants us to believe. This occurs because of the enormous effort required to keep the two apart; one of the effects of Dante's realism—and one of its most insidious forms of self-protection—is that it causes people to think one agrees with him when one paraphrases him (as all teachers of the *Commedia* know, it is difficult to persuade one's students otherwise).<sup>21</sup> By the same token, the reverse is also true: Dante's realism causes critics to tend to "believe" Dante without knowing that they believe him, i.e. to pose their critical questions and situate their critical debates within the very presuppositions of the fiction they are seeking to understand. (An example of such behavior is the common defensive move we could call the collocation fallacy, whereby a critic argues that view x is not possible with regard to soul x, because if it were soul x would be located elsewhere; arguing thus, we approach the poem through the lens of its own fiction treated as dogma.) One need not be a religious believer to be a narrative believer of the *Commedia*; as the history of the poem's reception repeatedly demonstrates, many presumably nonnaïve readers have proved unable to suspend their suspension of disbelief.

As a means for slipping out of the paradoxical grip of the poem's claims and counter-claims, I suggest that we read the *Commedia* less theologically and more practically. The time has come for us to be more interested in *how* the *Commedia* works than in *what* it says; we should examine the formal structures (practising what Gian Biagio Conte calls "una filologia della struttura narrativa" [112]) that manipulate the reader so successfully that even now we are blinded, prevented by the text's fulfillment of its self-imposed goals from fully appreciating its achievements as artifact. What is needed to get some purchase on a poem that has traditionally been read as Fundamentalists read the Bible is not a "new historicism," which is an effective tool vis-à-vis texts that have always been read as texts, i.e. as false, but a "new formalism": a tool that will not run aground on the text's presentation of itself as true. In other words, we must detheologize our reading if we are to understand what makes the theology stick. For the final irony of our tradition of Dante exegesis is that, as a direct result of our *theologus-poeta* dichotomy, and frequently in the name of preserving the poetry, we have obscured its greatness by accepting uncritically its directives and its premises, its "theology." To the extent that we read as the poet directs us to read we have not fully appreciated the magnificence of his direction. To the extent that we hearken always to what Dante says rather than take note of what he has done, we treat him as he would have us treat him—not as a poet, but as an authority, a "theologian."

In *Dante's Poets*, I had occasion to note that "If, in Singleton's formula, the fiction of the *Comedy* is that it is no fiction, then it follows that the strategy of the *Comedy* is that there is no strategy" (90). My concern now is to more fully identify the workings of this strategy that would deny its own existence. Previously, I used the example of Cacciaguida, whose explanation that the pilgrim has been shown only famous souls, "anime che son di fama note," is frequently cited by critics; less frequently have they noted—Auerbach is one exception that comes to mind—that Cacciaguida's statement is not true.<sup>22</sup> As I have pointed out, most of the souls we meet in the *Commedia* are famous because the *Commedia* has made them famous, and Cacciaguida's anticipation of this process effects a contamination between text and life that is precisely what Dante seeks to achieve.<sup>23</sup> Another example of this self-denying strategy is the



inscription on the gate of hell, analyzed by John Freccero, unusual among Dante scholars for his longstanding pursuit of the implications of form, in terms of the poet's successful attempt to "establish the fiction of immediacy" (98). Reminding us that "*Vision* is the province of the prophet, but the task of the poet is *representation*" (95), Freccero seeks to "dispel the unexamined assumption, encouraged by the fiction, of an innocent author describing an infernal reality rather than constructing it" (104). Like the representation of God's art on Purgatory's terrace of pride, which confronts the reader with the conundrum of the poet's verisimilar art re-presenting an art defined as the *ver* itself,<sup>24</sup> Cacciaguida creates an "optical illusion" within the text, as do the verses that affect to present God's words on the gates of hell. It is important to note that these examples come from all three canticles: on the representational front the poem is neutral; in the mimetic realm collocation does not imply value, as it does in the thematic sphere. The above examples are taken from *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* to make the point that we cannot approach these issues by invoking the theological grid that we have become so accustomed to imposing on the *Commedia*, whereby whatever happens in hell is "bad," problematic, and whatever happens in heaven is "good," problem-free. Whereas this formulation may be accurate with respect to the text's content, its plot, and therefore the pilgrim, it need not be accurate with respect to its form, and therefore the poet: the *Paradiso* is *not* more serene, formally, than the *Inferno*.<sup>25</sup>

Dante consistently manipulates narrative in ways that authenticate his text, making it appear inevitable, a *fatale andare*, and conferring upon himself the authority that in fact we have rarely denied him. In the instances just cited, as in so many others, we have listened to what Dante says, accepting it as true—as though he were a "theologian"—rather than looking at, and learning from, the gap that exists between what he says and what he has actually wrought. To the extent, then, that we have not dealt with the implications of Dante's claims to be a second St. Paul, a second St. John, we have not put ourselves in a position to fully grasp the genius of his poetry—of its ability to construct a textual metaphysics so enveloping that it prevents us from analyzing the conditions that give rise to the illusion that such a metaphysics is possible. In "The Irreducible Dove," Singleton

answers the charges of critics who fear that his beliefs with regard to Dante's allegory put him "in danger of succumbing so completely to the illusion of reality in Dante's poem as to forget that it is illusion" (129). Although he did not realize it, preferring as he did to think in terms of restoring a medieval *forma mentis* that authorized such illusion, and thus being "allowed to recover from the Renaissance, if only for a brief reader's moment" (135), Singleton's attempt to locate the source of the illusion in the fiction that pretends it is not a fiction is a first step to dismantling the *Commedia*'s textual metaphysics. His critics, precisely in proportion to their level-headed and rational refusal to succumb to a preposterous theory about a preposterous claim, reveal themselves to be the more fully duped by an author whose cunning they have not begun to penetrate. We must work to show how the illusion is constructed, forged, made—by a man who is precisely, after all, "only" a *fabbro*, a maker . . . a poet.

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## NOTES

- 1 "Non artificio letterario, ma vera visione profetica ritenne Dante quella concessa a lui da Dio, per una grazia singolare, allo scopo preciso che egli, conosciuta la verità sulla cagione che il mondo aveva fatto reo, la denunziasse agli uomini, manifestando ad essi tutto quello che aveva veduto e udito" (376).
- 2 Croce comments: "Ma che le meticolose spiegazioni che egli dà sulla configurazione dei luoghi e sui modi del viaggio, e sul tempo che gli occorre per compierlo, e sui fenomeni che osservò, e, soprattutto, le dissertazioni con le quali spiega e giustifica quelle cose immaginate e le tratta come fatti reali che confermano una teoria scientifica e ne sono confermati, rechino prova che esso stesso fosse ingannato dalle proprie immaginazioni e le prendesse per fatti reali, e cadesse in una sorte di allucinazione; questo, sebbene sia stato in vari modi sostenuto, non è per niun conto da ammettere. E non già perché con tale ipotesi s'introdurrebbe nel genio di Dante una troppo grande mistura di demenza e si verrebbe meno al rispetto che gli si deve; ma veramente perché l'ipotesi contrasta alla limpidezza e consapevolezza della mente e dell'animo di lui, e, per di più, non è necessaria" (61).
- 3 "Dante fu vero profeta, non perché i suoi disegni di riforma politica ed ecclesiastica si siano attuati (riconosciamo, anzi, che, dato il corso naturale degli avvenimenti, erano inattuabili, quali si sono rivelati), ma perché, come tutti i grandi profeti, seppe levare lo sguardo oltre gli avvenimenti che si svolgevano

sotto i suoi occhi, e additare un ideale eterno di giustizia" (415). Before reaching this concluding generality, Nardi takes Dante's pretensions even more seriously, rebutting the charge that the Florentine's prophecies were unverified by history by pointing out that the same can be said of Old Testament prophecies: "Si può rispondere che altrettanto accadde per la restaurazione del trono di David, annunciata come imminente dagli antichi profeti" (409).

- 4 See, for instance, my *Dante's Poets*. To study Dante's handling of his precursors is necessarily to study his truth claims, since he consistently formulates the difference between his poetry and that of his predecessors in terms of truth versus falsehood. All the more reason, therefore, considering the current interest in Dante's intertextuality, to reexamine our underlying suppositions regarding his mode of signifying.
- 5 In the opening paragraph of his *De reprobatione monarchiae*, Vernani speaks of vessels used by the devil, "mendax et perniciosi pater mendacii," that tempt with a beautiful exterior while containing poison within. Among such vessels is the author of the *Commedia*: "Inter alia vero talia sua [i.e. of the devil] vasa quidam fuit multa fantastice poetizans et sophista verbosus, verbis exterioribus in eloquentia multis gratus, qui suis poetici fantasmatis et figmentis, iuxta verbum philosophic Boetium consolantis, scenicas meretriculas adducendo, non solum egros animos, sed etiam studiosos dulcibus sirenarum cantibus conducit fraudulenter ad interitum salutifere veritatis" (93). Vernani adopts to his own ends the inside/outside model used by the commentators to point to the allegorical truth beneath poetry's fictitious veil; for him the beautiful exterior leads not to truth but to falsehood. The poetry of the *Commedia* is likened to the Boethian sirens, who lead away from truth with their "dulcibus cantibus"—a fascinating alignment in light of the unmasked siren of *Purgatorio* 19. Also intriguing is the fact that Vernani's treatise is addressed to one of the *Commedia*'s early commentators, Graziolo de' Bambaglioli.
- 6 Singleton notes: "Indeed, with some Dante scholars, so strong has the persuasion been that such a view of the allegory of the *Divine Comedy* is the correct one [i.e. that the allegory of poets is the correct one] that it has brought them to question the authorship of the famous letter to Can Grande. This, in all consistency, was bound to occur" (86). See, for instance, Hollander's rebuttal of Scott on this issue (55 n. 36).
- 7 Neither scholar seems aware of the other; Singleton's 1954 monograph contains no reference to Nardi, and Nardi's 1960 essay makes no mention of Singleton.
- 8 An example of the former tendency is Anthony K. Cassell, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice*, a work which shows little appreciation for the ways in which poetry undermines theological certitude (see my review in *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 [1985]: 705–8). On the other side, see Aldo Scaglione's rebuttal of Cassell's reading of Pier della Vigna, "Dante's Poetic Orthodoxy."
- 9 On Dante as *scriba Dei*, see Gian Roberto Sarolli, *Prolegomena alla Divina Commedia*. In the section entitled "La visione dantesca come visione paolina,"

Sarolli notes that the *Commedia*, whose "titolo [è] esemplato sulla davidica teodia," belongs to the "genere delle visioni profetiche" (118). On Dante and David, maker of the *teodia*, see also *Dante's Poets* 275–78.

- 10 See, for instance, Nicolò Mineo, *Profetismo e apocalittica in Dante*, a work that has been insufficiently absorbed into the critical discussion. Sarolli's own emphasis on the esoteric may have helped obscure the general importance of his sense of Dante as a prophetic poet.
- 11 For Padoan's description of the debate between Mazzoni and Nardi, with full bibliography, see "La 'mirabile visione'" 40–41.
- 12 Padoan cites Francesco da Buti: "'fu' io': cioè fu' io Dante, e questo si de' intendere ch'elli ci fu *intellettualmente*, ma *non corporalmente*, ma *finge* secondo la lettera ch'elli vi fusse corporalmente" (42).
- 13 For further discussion, see my review, *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 (1988): 291–92.
- 14 While Padoan justifies the Epistle's inclusion of "fictivus" as a "modus tractandi" of the *Commedia* (51), Dronke takes it as indicating that the *Commedia* is a fiction, and thus as a sign that the Epistle is not Dante's (127). More frequently, the presence of *fictivus* has been used to bolster the anti-Singletonians (Hollander 64 n. 53).
- 15 One of the most interesting elaborations of Nardi in recent years is that of Guglielmo Gorni, who asks "se la profezia, nella *Commedia*, non ha statuto di frammento entro l'opera, bensì è una struttura latente e persistente, che emerge e quasi si coagula in singoli episodi, in quali punti precisi del poema Dante fa emergere la coscienza metatestuale di questo fatto decisivo nella costruzione della sua 'visione'?" (50).
- 16 An example of a metatextual reading that, I believe, bears out this assertion is my "Dante's Heaven of the Sun as a Meditation on Narrative."
- 17 Hollander's incongruous sense of Dante as ironic, parodic, and humorous in these matters is the logical consequence of his refusal to believe that Dante believes; thus, with respect to the Geryon episode's insistence on veracity, he comments: "One senses behind Dante's passage an authorial wink, lest we take it for a nod: 'I know you won't believe this (why should you? —I don't either), but the convention of my poem compels me to claim historicity even for such as Geryon'" (76). The same logical necessity leads to a singularly unsatisfying response to the question of why Dante chooses to use the allegory of theologians in the first place: "The answers that have been offered (to make his poem 'more true,' to be in closer accord with the theology it professes), while being basically acceptable, have missed, I believe, the central point. Dante's choice reflects his own engagement in the battle against poetry which is closely identified with St. Thomas and the Dominican Order" (84).
- 18 For the implications of this verse, see *Dante's Poets* 214 and *passim*.
- 19 See "Dante's Addresses to the Reader" and "The Addresses to the Reader in the *Commedia*." I quote from the latter: "It would seem strange to me that Professor Auerbach, the author of such excellent works as "Dante the

Poet of This World" and "Mimesis" did not think (or not primarily think) of the possibility that Dante's addresses are meant to be in the service of—precisely!—*Mimesis*, of the description of the other world carried out with the vividness, or realism, with which things of this world may be described, and I can attribute Auerbach's failure to draw the consequences of *Mimesis* for our particular problem only to that understandable tendency of the scholar to tire of those very categories he has most superbly developed in other works of his. 'The authority and the urgency of a prophet'—this interpretation smacks more of the arrogantly heiratic solemnity of Stefan George or of certain would-be religious poses applied to Dante by certain American critics than of the urbane thisworldliness and the subtle flair for artistry and its techniques that have ever characterized Erich Auerbach's writing" (158).

- 20 The psychology that informs Dante's application of what I call the Geryon principle, whereby the least credible of his representations is supported by the most unyielding and overt of authorial interventions (for elaboration, see my "Arachne, Argus, and St. John"), is well understood by Spitzer: "To give the reader 'something to do' about a matter difficult to imagine is a psychological inducement to make him accept this subject matter" (152). By the same token, Bloomfield anticipates a good deal of Gellrich's book when he writes "all authenticating devices not only authenticate but also call attention to the need for authentication and hence to the inauthenticity of the work of art" (340).
- 21 Unfortunately, it is also difficult to persuade one's colleagues otherwise; in my own case, I would disagree with John G. Demaray's assessment that I take a "modern idealist posture that the 'only external referent' upon which Dante based the truth of the *Commedia* is a transcendent God" (42 note). That is what Dante tells us, not what I believe.
- 22 "Of the characters which appear in it [the *Commedia*], some belong to the recent past or even to the contemporary present and (despite *Par.* 17.136–38), not all of them are famous or carefully chosen" (184).
- 23 *Dante's Poets* 282.
- 24 See my "Ricare la creazione divina: l'arte aracnea della cornice dei superbi."
- 25 For Dante's awareness of the problems inherent in representing paradise, see "Dante's Heaven of the Sun as a Meditation on Narrative." Since one of my three examples is provided by another critic, it behooves me to indicate the differences in our formulations. In Freccero's reading form remains subservient to theology, as is indicated by the fact that his view of Dantesque mimesis distinguishes very discretely between the various canticles. Thus, he begins "Infernal Irony" by 1) invoking the *De Genesi ad litteram*'s three kinds of vision—corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual—as analogies for the kinds of representation found in each canticle, and by 2) suggesting that "mimesis is peculiarly infernal and represents Dante's effort to render corporeal vision" (96). I do not agree: while irony may be peculiarly infernal, mimesis is a problem for the poet throughout the poem; it is a problem that if anything

escalates as the poem proceeds. To associate the three canticles with Augustine's three types of vision is to address the matter of their *content*, not the matter of their *form*.

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## Error in Dante's *Convivio*

Dante writes the *Convivio* to rectify an error of reading. He makes it clear in the first chapter where he points out that the *canzoni* have not been read properly. The reader too taken by their beauty has ignored their true moral worth, "a molti loro bellezza più che loro bontade era in grado" (1.1.14). But the *Convivio* is not meant for everyone because not everyone can benefit from Dante's commentary. Although by nature every man desires to know since man's final happiness consists in the ultimate perfection of the soul, which is attained through knowledge, not everyone is capable of attaining it (1.1.1). Dante lists a series of impediments that prevent man from fulfilling this natural desire and that affect equally the body and the soul. They can be divided in two types: internal and external impediments. The body is internally handicapped when it is physically incapable of receiving knowledge as in the case of deaf-mutes and people with similar shortcomings (1.1.3). The soul is similarly incapacitated when it is crippled by malice, which deceives it by making everything appear cheap and worthless (1.1.3). Readers affected by these internal disorders of body and soul should not even bother to take a seat at the banquet. Their defects are such that no understanding is possible.

E però ad esso non s'assetti alcuno male de' suoi organi disposto, però che né denti né lingua ha né palato; né alcuno assettatore di vizii, perché lo stomaco suo è pieno d'omori venenosi contrarii, sì che mai vivanda non terrebbe. (1.1.12)

Dante invites to his banquet only those readers whose defects of body and soul are external. These are the cripples of necessity, "di necessitate," who are too busy or too lazy to read or to seek the company of the learned.

Ma venga qua qualunque è [per cura] familiare o civile ne la umana fame rimaso, e ad una mensa con li altri simili impediti s'assetti; e a li loro piedi si pongano tutti quelli che per pigrizia si sono stati, che non sono degni di più alto sedere: e quelli e questi prendano la mia vivanda col pane, che la farà loro e gustare e patire. (1.1.13)

In other words, those affected by internal disorders, physical or spiritual, will not be able to benefit from Dante's explanation of the *canzoni* whose aim is to point to man the way to true happiness. Only if the defects are not inherent in the reader, but external to him, can he hope to overcome them and benefit from being served a higher form of nourishment.

The *Convivio* is not written solely for the benefit of those readers who have misread Dante's doctrinal poems. The work has implications for Dante's literary production as well. The *Convivio* is meant to go beyond the thematics of Dante's earlier work, the *Vita Nuova*, the *New Life*, that Dante now regards as a work of the past, reflecting the enthusiasm and passion of youth and no longer adequate. The *Convivio*, instead, is meant to be the statement of a more sober and mature meditation in keeping with Dante's newly arrived at awareness.

E se ne la presente opera, la quale è Convivio nominata e vo che sia, più virilmente si trattasse che ne la Vita Nuova, non intendo però a quella in parte alcuna derogare, ma maggiormente giovare per questa quella; veggendo sì come ragionevolmente quella fervida e passionata, questa temperata e virile esser conviene. Ché altro si conviene e dire e operare ad una etade che ad altra; perché certi costumi sono idonei e laudabili ad una etade che sono sconci e biasimevoli ad altra, sì come di sotto, nel quarto trattato di questo libro, sarà propria ragione mostrata. E io in quella dinanzi, a l'entrata de la mia gioventute parlai, e in questa dipoi, quella già trapassata. (1.1.16-7)

Yet no conflict is meant between these two works.<sup>1</sup> The *Vita Nuova* is to the *Convivio* as youth is to adulthood.<sup>2</sup> Between them there is the same continuity and difference that exists between two stages of a man's life. In terms of literary representation, this difference is expressed in terms of the allegorical exposition that Dante means to give in the *Convivio*. The youthful stage of the *Vita Nuova* corresponds to a period of literalism when the passion and enthusiasm of youth places value solely on appearances. In the more moderate and manly stage of the *Convivio*, Dante has learned to go beyond the appearances of things to the allegorical truth behind. In other words, the *Convivio* is also the place where Dante's own youthful impediments have been overcome in the reasoned affirmation of the new awareness. The distance taken from the *Vita Nuova* now marks a shift from the poet's youthful love for Beatrice to his present ma-

ture love for wisdom, for Lady Philosophy ("filo-sofia"),<sup>3</sup> and from a literal or symbolic mode to an allegorical one. The bread of commentary that Dante distributes to his readers consists of the same knowledge that he himself has acquired by overcoming his youthful errors. The allegorical exposition that Dante intends to give ought to likewise enable his readers to go beyond the limiting and misleading appearances of a first reading to the true knowledge that lies behind the *canzoni*. The love of knowledge necessary to overcome these impediments will lead to an understanding of the true nature of knowledge and of the nobility that it bestows on man.

When Dante alludes to his youthful error in the *Convivio*, it is to resolve the apparent discrepancy between the ballad "Voi che savete ragionar d'Amore" (*Rime* 80) and the *canzone* "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" (*Rime* 81) discussed in the third book of the *Convivio*. In the ballad, Dante had spoken ill of philosophy calling her "disdegnosa" and "fera."<sup>4</sup> However, in the *canzone*, he not only praises philosophy for her beauty and virtue, but calls her "divina."

In lei discende la virtù divina  
 sì come fece angelo che 'l vede;  
 e qual donna gentil questo non crede  
 vada con lei e miri li atti sui.

(37-40)

Dante's explanation of the discrepancy is lengthy and aims at demonstrating that objects very often are not what they appear to be at first sight and that truth is usually discordant with appearances, "alcuna volta, la veritate si discorda da l'apparenza, e, altra, per diverso rispetto si puote trattare" (3.9.5). He gives the parallel example of the sky that although clear most of the time is sometimes dark. "Dico: *Tu sai che 'l ciel sempr'è lucente e chiaro*, cioè sempr'è con chiaritate; ma per alcuna cagione alcuna volta è licito di dire quello essere tenebroso" (3.9.5). Dante goes on to distinguish two types of objects: those that can be properly understood and those that cannot. He dismisses those that present difficulties to the understanding, those that are neither visible nor tangible, and concentrates on those elements, like color and light, that can be easily apprehended by sight. "Ma lo colore e la luce sono propriamente; perché solo col viso comprendiamo ciò, e non con altro senso" (3.9.6). Dante is concerned only with this latter category of objects.

In order to explain what could go wrong, Dante sums up briefly the process of apprehension and representation of objects. He explains this process as a movement of the object's visible form toward the eye through the medium of air. The visible form becomes imprinted in the pupil's humour and becomes visible. In this fashion the image becomes registered on the brain by the sensitive faculty and we see (3.9.7-9). The point of the explanation is to stress that in order to have true representation it is necessary that both the medium and the humour of the pupil be clear and transparent. Any interference with the medium of transmission or any defect in the eye will hinder the reception of the visible form and distort the image.

Per che, acciò che la visione sia verace, cioè cotale qual è la cosa visibile in sé, conviene che lo mezzo per lo quale a l'occhio viene la forma sia senza ogni colore, a l'acqua de la pupilla similmente; altrimenti si macolerebbe la forma visibile del color del mezzo e di quello de la pupilla. (3.9.9)

The medium can be defective when, for instance, the presence of the sun makes it impossible to see the stars or when vapours rise from the earth (3.9.12). Or the defect can be in the eye that receives the form as when the eye is inflamed by illness or fatigue (3.9.13).<sup>5</sup> In either case what is transmitted to the "visual spirit" is altered and the image is no longer concordant with the object. Dante makes this digression to justify the behaviour of the "young" ballad, *ballatetta*,<sup>6</sup> which because of inexperience had mistaken philosophy for a proud and pitiless woman. Just as the stars sometimes appear different because of some infirmity of the eye or some alteration of the medium, so the young ballad because of an infirmity of the soul judged philosophy solely according to appearances.

Partendomi da questa disgressione che mestiere è stata a vedere la veritate, ritorno al proposito e dico che sì come li nostri occhi 'chiamano', cioè giudicano, la stella talora altrimenti che sia la vera sua condizione, così quella ballatetta considerò questa donna secondo l'apparenza, discordante dal vero per infertade de l'anima, che di troppo disio era passionata. (3.10.1)

Dante's explanation is that the soul, as it moves closer to the object of its desire, becomes incapable of judging rationally and can only infer "sensually," as an animal, according to appearances.

onde, quanto la cosa desiderata più appropinqua al desiderante, tanto lo

desiderio è maggiore, e l'anima, più passionata, più si unisce a la parte concupiscibile e più abbandona la ragione. Sì che allora non giudica come uomo la persona, ma quasi come altro animale pur secondo l'apparenza, non discernendo la veritate. (3.10.2)

The *ballatetta*, which believed philosophy to be "disdainful" and "pitiless" judged like an animal according to the senses, "sensuale giudicio" (3.10.3); the *canzone*, instead, judged philosophy rationally according to the truth, "secondo la veritate."

Dante's explanation repropose the initial dichotomy that characterizes the distance between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*. Error is the result of a too passionate soul unable to judge rationally according to the truth. This error, however, is overcome in the more mature and rational soul capable of going beyond appearances. The error of the young ballad is left behind and the truth of philosophy is celebrated by the *canzone*.

*E con ciò sia cosa che la vera intenzione mia fosse altra che quella che di fuori mostrano le canzoni predette, per allegorica esposizione quelle intendo mostrare, appresso la litterale istoria ragionata; sì che l'una ragione e l'altra darà sapore a coloro che a questa cena sono invitati. (1.1.18; italics mine)*

The *Convivio* is the place where error is not only denounced but corrected in the light of a more rational and mature awareness. At the cognitive level, the work is a shift toward philosophy and its virtues, whereas at the level of representation it is a shift away from the literal, or the symbolic, to the allegorical. Truth resides at this level of representation and Dante's aim in the *Convivio* is to explicate this sense to its readers.

The fact that the *Convivio* was left unfinished is not the only indication that, notwithstanding Dante's assurances to the contrary, the road that he has paved for man's happiness is not entirely free of obstacles. Dante provides us with other reasons in chapter 10 of Book 3 where he alludes to his technique of blaming the young ballad as "dissimulazione."

E questa cotale figura in rettorica è molto laudabile, e anco necessaria, cioè quando le parole sono a una persona e la 'ntenzione è a un'altra; però che l'ammonire è sempre laudabile e necessario e non sempre sta convenevolmente ne la bocca di ciascuno. . . . questa figura è bellissima e utilissima, e puotesi chiamare '*dissimulazione*'. (3.10.6-7; italics mine)

The figure of dissimulation shifts the blame from Dante to the *ballatetta* making it appear the young ballad's fault rather than the poet's. A very common poetic device. Even in common usage the work and the poet are often exchanged metonymically when we say "Dante" to mean his works. But the figure of *dissimulatio* is not a case of metonymy and, as it is used by Dante, it is not just a stylistic device but has moral implications. The figure is used in condemning a vice when it is not proper to name the offender directly either because it would bring him shame and dishonour, or because harm could come of it.

Onde, quando lo figlio è conoscente del vizio del padre, e quando lo suddito è conoscente del vizio del signore, e quando l'amico conosce che vergogna crescerebbe al suo amico quello ammonendo o menomerebbe suo onore, o conosce l'amico suo non paziente ma iracundo a l'ammonizione. . . . (3.10.7)

Which is Dante's case? His dissimulation has obviously the aim of drawing the reader's attention away from himself to hide the shame of having misjudged philosophy's true nature. But is this all there is to it? Dante's next example of dissimulation provides us with more helpful hints. It tells of a wise warrior who, in order to draw attention away from where the real battle is taking place, feigns an attack on another side.

Ed è simigliante a l'opera di quello savio guerrero che combatte lo castello da uno lato per levare la difesa da l'altro, che non vanno ad una parte la 'ntenzione de l'aiutorio e la battaglia. (3.10.8)

The dissimulation has the purpose of covering up something. It distracts the attention of the observer by making something else appear to be the case. In other words, what appears to the observer to be the case is, on analysis, only a dissimulation. How can this type of dissimulation be said to be applicable to Dante in the *Convivio*? In what way can it be said that Dante is acting like the wise warrior? To answer these questions we must go back to that section where the poet justifies the error of the *ballatetta* and his own. The passage, partly quoted earlier, is the following.

così quella ballatetta considerò questa donna secondo l'apparenza, *discordante dal vero per infertade de l'anima*, che di troppo disio era passionata. (3.10.1; italics mine)

In attributing the error to the young ballad, Dante is covering up the fact that the impediment in question is internal, the result of an infirmity of the soul, and not easily corrected as the analogy with the infirmity of the eye first led us to believe. As Dante had stated in the first chapter of the *Convivio*, defects that depend on internal causes, such as infirmities of the soul and of the body, cannot be corrected. Only those flaws that result from external causes are susceptible of correction. Dante's dissimulation is to make an internal and impossible impediment appear external and amenable to solution. Furthermore, by shifting the blame to the young ballad the error is minimized as a youthful blunder belonging to a past which has been safely left behind.

The dissimulation is not limited to this one case but invests the entire project of the *Convivio*. Just as the ballad's impediment is said to be amenable to correction so is the reader's. The wise poet's strategy is meant ultimately for the reader who is made to believe that through the *canzoni* and their commentary he can easily acquire wisdom and achieve the happiness he so much desires. Dante assures his readers that those who have not been fortunate enough to have this wisdom bestowed upon them at birth will be able to acquire it through learning.

E similmente puote essere, per molta correzione e cultura, che là dove questo seme dal principio non cade, si puote indurre [n]el suo processo, sì che perviene a questo frutto; ed è uno modo quasi d'insetare l'altrui natura sopra diversa radice. E però nullo è che possa essere scusato; ché se da sua naturale radice uomo non ha questa sementa, ben la puote avere per via d'insetazione. (4.22.12)

Here the soul of man handicapped by the sensual appetite no longer is a factor and an impediment to learning as it was in the first chapter of the *Convivio*. Now the flaw is said to be not in man but in his circumstances. If the seed of goodness has by chance gone astray depriving man of his natural and ultimate happiness, this temporary and unfortunate situation can be corrected through the grafting of knowledge. The flaw, in other words, is no longer inherent in man but external to him. As in the case of the *ballatetta*, an internal impediment is now said to be external and beyond man's control and thus easily amendable. While in the first chapter, it was said, in no uncertain terms, that the soul can be handicapped by the sensual

appetites, in Book 4 Dante insists that the soul can only be rational.

E non dicesse alcuno che ogni appetito sia animo; *ché qui s'intende animo solamente quello che spetta a la parte razionale, cioè la voluntade e lo intelletto. Sì che se volesse chiamare animo l'appetito sensitivo, qui non ha luogo, né istanza puote avere*; *ché nullo dubita che l'appetito razionale non sia più nobile che 'l sensuale, e però più amabile: e così è questo di che ora si parla.* (4.22.10; italics mine)

Dante's strategy of dissimulation is to provide a one-sided view of human nature and one in which human error is the result of causes independent of man's will and, for this reason, open to correction. Either through the practice of a moral active life or through the more perfect contemplative life, man has at his disposal two ways to achieve happiness *directly* and without impediments.

E così appare che nostra beatitudine (questa felicitade di cui si parla) prima trovare potemo quasi imperfetta ne la vita attiva, cioè ne le operazioni de le morali virtù, e poi perfetta quasi ne le operazioni de le intellettuali. Le quali due operazioni sono *vie expedite e direttissime* a menare a la somma beatitudine, la quale qui non si puote avere, come appare pur per quello che detto è. (4.22.18; italics mine)

In either case and with the help of Dante's exposition in the *Convivio*, the reader will be brought back on the right and quickest path to "supreme beatitude." As the wise warrior, Dante distracts the reader's attention away from the real issue. Instead of confronting them with their own flaws, which in some cases might entail a recognition of the impossibility of correction, Dante pretends that wisdom can be easily acquired and easily imparted. It is a way of tricking the reader into believing that he too can improve through the study of philosophy but, as the incomplete *Convivio* and Dante's subsequent *Commedia* demonstrates, it is a dissimulation that cannot be sustained and which is bound to fail.

Dante's strategy is not unrelated to the role that Virgil or the *Aeneid* play in the *Convivio* as the literary model for Dante's enterprise. Ulrich Leo, in his seminal essay on the *Convivio*, argues that one of the reasons that led Dante to abandon the *Convivio* for the *Commedia* was a more profound knowledge of the classical authors and of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in particular.

This reading of the *Aeneid*, particularly of book VI, may have given him the final impulse to put into action what, virtually, had already become



nearly inevitable: to discontinue the *Convivio*, an ethical treatise, and also the *De Vulgari eloquentia*, and to go himself, as a poet, to Hell and Heaven. There he might hope to see, with his eyes opened and strengthened by divine grace, those things which, during the time of the *Convivio*, he had only *thought or believed*. (60)

By analysing the quotation pattern from the classics and from the *Aeneid*, Ulrich Leo shows that Dante, by the time he was writing the fourth treatise, had acquired a direct knowledge of these works. He no longer quotes from them but gives plot summaries that only a close reading can provide. Useful as this observation may be to a better comprehension of Dante's sources as well as to an understanding of the *Convivio*, the conclusions that he draws from it are conditioned by the accepted belief of Virgil as Dante's "duce" and as the voice of natural reason (Leo 61). Although Virgil fulfills the role of the guide and does embody the attributes of reason, Dante's relation to Virgil and to his poem is not as accepting as we have so far been led to believe. Besides providing Dante with the idea of undertaking a similar journey in the afterlife, a closer reading of the *Aeneid* also proved to him that the commonplaces on Virgil that he had unquestioningly accepted from tradition and which he had used in his works, were not correct. A closer reading of the *Aeneid*, of which Dante will ironically boast to Virgil in the *Commedia*, as well as a reading of Juvenal's *Satires* especially where they relate to Virgil, revealed a different Virgil to him. As the poet of the Empire writing the history of its origins and of its foundation, Virgil had compromised his art by employing a double standard of justice to cover up the aberrations committed by the ancestors of the Romans for whom he was writing. It is more probable, therefore, that the opposite of what Ulrich Leo claims is the case. A closer reading of the *Aeneid* must have persuaded Dante that the work did not provide an ethical model to follow and, in particular, that Aeneas was not the symbol of everything that is noble in man. The ethical values on which the *Commedia* is founded entail a rejection of the compromised system of values of the *Aeneid* as well as of an Aeneas-like figure as the central character of the poem.<sup>7</sup>

Even more interesting, for our present purposes, are the similarities between Dante's strategy of dissimulation, to which we have alluded earlier, and Virgil's compromised ethics. Dante's misrepre-

sentation of the conditions that make it possible to acquire wisdom is not unlike Virgil's cover up of the crimes committed by the ancestors of the Romans or by those protected by Roman Gods. In both cases, the distortion is in function of a public that the poet wants to ingratiate and cajole. As the dissimulation of the wise warrior aims at conquering the castle, the wise poet wants to win over his readers or, as in Virgil's case, to keep his patron happy and satisfied. The differences are clear. The moment Dante knows the hopelessness of ever returning to Florence or becomes aware through Virgil of the bankruptcy of an ethical model based on dissimulation, that is the time he breaks off the *Convivio* to write a poem that will expose all deceits, including his own in this work.

Dante's dissimulation at the thematic level has its necessary counterpart at the level of textual representation. Dante's promise of a philosophy that redeems and ensures happiness depends on its teachability and on the reader's ability to decipher its signs. This had been the problem with the *ballatetta* and with reading the *canzoni*. At the level of representation, Dante's dissimulation takes the form of a claim that a commentary can explain the meaning (of the figure) of the *canzoni* as if this meaning were self-evident.<sup>8</sup> In the *Convivio*, the account of the literal meaning of the *canzoni* is followed by an explanation of the latent allegorical sense *as if* it were its inevitable and natural analogue. The literal is said to accompany the allegorical as bread a meal.

Dante's dissimulation takes the form of a theory of allegory which is equated to a mode of allegorical reading common to theologians. In the Second Book, before commenting on the first *canzone*, Dante tells the reader that he wants him to understand the poems allegorically in the same way that scriptures are read according to the four allegorical levels.

Dico che, sì come nel primo capitolo è narrato, questa sposizione conviene essere litterale e allegorica. E a ciò dare a intendere, si vuol sapere che le scritture si possono intendere e deonsi esponere massimamente per quattro sensi. (2.1.2)

Dante enumerates the four meanings—literal, allegorical, moral and anagogic—but does not follow the practice himself. He adds that the poets read the allegory differently from the theologians and he intends to follow the way of the poets.

*Veramente* li teologi questo senso prendono altrimenti che li poeti; ma però che mia intenzione è qui lo modo de li poeti seguitare, prendo lo senso allegorico secondo che per li poeti è usato. (2.1.4; italics mine)

Dante's intention is to explain the literal and the allegorical meanings and, from time to time, to touch also on the others, "e talvolta de li altri sensi toccherò *incidentemente*, come a luogo è a tempo si converrà" (2.1.15; italics mine). Indeed, these two other meanings are so "incidental" to the exposition that Dante very rarely uses them. When he does they are not readings of a *canzone* but of Scripture. In the Fourth Book, the example of Martha and Mary as symbols of the active and contemplative life is a reading of the Gospel of Luke.

*Che se moralemente ciò volemo esponere*, volse lo nostro Signore in ciò mostrare che la contemplativa vita fosse ottima, tutto che buona fosse l'attiva: ciò è manifesto a chi ben vuole porre mente e le evangeliche parole. (4.17.11; italics mine)

And when in the Fourth Book, Dante wants the benefit of his commentary to reach the reader immediately, he even does away with the pretense of the allegorical commentary.

e comincai una canzone nel cui principio dissi: *Le dolci rime d'amor ch' i' solia*. Ne la quale io intendo riducer la gente in diritta via sopra la propria conoscenza de la verace nobilitade; sì come per la conoscenza del suo testo, a la esposizione del quale ora s'intende, vedere si potrà. E però che in questa canzone s'intese a rimedio così necessario, non era buono sotto alcuna figura parlare, ma convennesi per via tostana questa medicina, acciò che fosse tostana la sanitate, [dare]; la quale corrotta, a così laida morte si correa. *Non sarà dunque mestiere ne la esposizione di costei alcuna allegoria aprire, ma solamente la sentenza secondo la lettera ragionare*. (4.1.10–11; italics mine)

Dante's pretext is dictated by a major concern. He wants to impress upon his readers that the *canzoni* have a definite moral content and not a passionate one, as some of his critics had insinuated.

Temo la infamia di tanta passione avere seguita, quanta concepe chi legge le sopra nominate canzoni in me avere signoreggiata; la quale infamia si cessa, per lo presente di me parlare, interamente, lo quale mostra che non passione ma virtù sia stata la movente cagione. (1.2.16)

Encouraging his readers to read as theologians read Scripture confers upon the *canzoni*, and on Dante's entire enterprise, the needed moral

authority that previously had been put in question.<sup>9</sup>

Dante's strategy of dissimulation is to equate the allegory of poets, which is a mode of poetic representation, with the allegory of theologians, which is a mode of reading. By stating that the allegory of theologians can read the allegory of poets, Dante makes the reader believe that the poetic figure is readable. Errors of interpretation, as I have already said, being dependent on external factors that can be easily corrected by eliminating the interfering causes. Dante's dissimulation conceals what elsewhere he has stated on account of the figure. In the chapter where he discusses the visible and the intelligible, Dante excludes the figure, amongst others, as that which is neither properly visible nor tangible.

Ben è altra cosa visibile, ma non propriamente, però che altro senso sente quello, sì che *non può dire che sia propriamente visibile, né propriamente tangibile; sì come è la figura*, la grandezza, lo numero, lo movimento e lo stare fermo, che sensibili [comuni] si chiamano: le quali cose con più sensi comprendiamo. (3.9.6; italics mine)

The figure is neither "propriamente visibile" nor "propriamente tangibile" because we comprehend it with more than one sense. Differently from color and light, which can be easily comprehended because they are apprehended by the sole sense of sight, the figure is difficult to comprehend. For example, in the sentence "Achilles is a lion" the connoted quality of courage is not readily available to understanding. It is not "propriamente" visible or tangible. Beside exercising the sense of sight we must also intuit what the figure "lion" stands for. This characteristic of the figure makes it very difficult to read and leads easily to error as when we read literally that Achilles *is* a lion or, in the young ballad's case, that philosophy is "fera" and "disdegnosa." But this error is not resolved by dismissing the figure just as human nature cannot be improved by taking into account only the rational side of the soul and by ignoring the sensitive appetites. This is Dante's error.

In the *Convivio* Dante aims to show his readers the true road to happiness by dissimulating the difficulties inherent in such undertaking.<sup>10</sup> The impediments, Dante argues, are external to man and can be easily overcome by an understanding that goes beyond the false appearances of things to the truth behind. Allegorical understanding, as the theologians practice it, enables the reader to benefit from the

moral teachings that the poet has represented in his *canzoni*. Dante's version of "come l'uom s'eterna" fails, however, because his desire to win over an audience leads him to falsify the true nature of the problem and its solutions. If the *Convivio* fails therefore, it is not because philosophy is incapable of bestowing true happiness on man nor is it because the allegory of the poets is deemed insufficient. It fails because it misrepresents, *willingly*, both man's ability to change and the true nature of poetic figuration. Just as no reader reading the *canzoni* could arrive at the allegorical explanation that Dante gives in the commentary, no reader reading Dante's *Convivio* could ever find true happiness.

Dante probably adopts this strategy because at the time he writes the *Convivio* he still hoped to return to Florence.<sup>11</sup> By writing this work in *volgare*, he probably hopes to ingratiate himself with his fellow Florentines and prove to them that he was the wise man, the *savio*, who could show them the way to true happiness.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps if he had returned to Florence and Henry of Luxembourg had lived to become the emperor of the Italian States, Dante would have continued the *Convivio* and stopped at the *De Monarchia*. But this was not to be. As an exile who knew he was never to return to his native city, the dissimulation that he had used to return to Florence was no longer necessary. In fact his attitude toward man's salvation changes drastically. In a new work, which adopts a genuine poetic allegory and where the commentary is left to the reader who learns as he goes, one is treated to a vision of Hell where all degrees of dissimulation are enumerated and punished before any hope of salvation can be entertained. As for Dante, his own dissimulation in the *Convivio* will be accounted for and denounced before a new banquet, the *Commedia*, can take place.

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## NOTES

- 1 Dante explains the difference between the young ballad and the *canzone* as that of two sisters who, although different and in opposition, are related by a common parent. "Per similitudine dico 'sorella' de l'opera che da uno medesimo operante è operata; ché la nostra operazione in alcuno modo è generazione"

- (3.9.4). ("I use the word 'sister' metaphorically, for a work which is written by the same author, since our work is in some sense a begetting.")
- 2 The terms that Dante uses in Book 4 (see especially chapter 24) are "Adolescenza" and "Gioventute." In discussing the difference between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*, I have preferred to use the more modern terminology of Youth and Adulthood to characterize this difference. This I have thought necessary to do in order to avoid unnecessary confusion and, eventually, unnecessary explanation.
  - 3 See 3.9.5–6 where Dante discusses the etymology of "filosofo" (philosopher) as "amatore di sapienza" and "Filosofia" as "amistanza a sapienza, o vero a sapere."
  - 4 Dante's criticism of philosophy in the ballad and his rejection of the "donna gentile" in the *Vita Nuova* are explainable, allegorically, by Dante's difficulties with the study of philosophy. See *Convivio* 3.15.19.
  - 5 Dante here is writing from experience. Because of long hours of reading, his eyesight had weakened and stars appeared to him blurred: "per affaticare lo viso molto, a studio di leggere, in tanto debilitai li spiriti visivi le stelle mi pareano tutte d'alcuno albore ombrate" (3.9.15). The example is particularly poignant because the study Dante is referring to is the study of philosophy.
  - 6 By *ballatetta* Dante wants to stress the inexperience and fervor typical of youth that led the ballad to its error. The more adequate English rendition of *ballatetta* is "young ballad."
  - 7 For these same reasons the *De Monarchia* cannot be thought a later work than the *Convivio*, as Ulrich Leo suggests basing it on Dante's greater knowledge of the *Aeneid* (59 n. 42). It is inconceivable that Dante could still make references to Virgil that were not ironic after breaking off with the *Convivio*.
  - 8 Dante makes frequent use of the figure of dissimulation in the *Rime*. I refer the reader to Patrick Boyde's excellent study on Dante's lyric poetry in which he stresses the importance of this figure for Dante, but a consideration of its broader implications for Dante's work and for the *Convivio* lie outside the scope of his study.
  - 9 A similar suggestion is made in the letter to Can Grande where again, in offering the cantica of *Paradiso* to the Lord of Verona and Vicenza, Dante wants to bestow upon this work the same moral authority that one gives the Bible. However, in my opinion, Dante's gesture is rhetorical, aimed at stressing the high seriousness of his poem and not to be taken as an hermeneutical key to his poem.
  - 10 The commentary in vernacular for instructional purposes is already a genre before the *Convivio*. Dante's predecessors are Brunetto Latini and Ristoro d'Arezzo who writes a work on astronomy. Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon* is the most celebrated example of a work that teaches the reader *how* to read according to the four levels of scriptural allegory. For general background on the *Convivio* see the appropriate chapter in Anderson.
  - 11 Versions of why Dante abandoned the writing of the *Convivio* abound. A

good summary of major critical trends is in Leo whose own reading favours a move toward "poetry and vision" precipitated by a reading of Book 4 of the *Aeneid*. The general critical trend has been to situate the break with the *Convivio* and the writing of the *Commedia* in terms of an opposition between prose and poetry, philosophy and theology, pagan philosophy and Christian philosophy, allegory of poets and allegory of theologians. For a critique along philosophical lines, see Mazzeo, Gilson, Nardi and Mazzotta. For studies that place emphasis on the theological aspect, see d'Alverny, Foster, Freccero and Singleton.

- 12 On this question, see Simonelli who argues that the Dante of the *Convivio* wants to be known and studied as an author but disagrees with the thesis that Dante went out of his way to please his readers to return to Florence.

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## L'Acheronte dantesco: morte del Pellegrino e della poesia

0. All'inizio del viaggio infernale, poco dopo aver varcato la porta dell'Inferno (*Inf.* 3.1–21) e osservato gli ignavi (3.35–36), Dante arriva al fiume Acheronte. Lungo la sponda del “fiume della morte,” dopo l'incontro con Caronte e la spiegazione di Virgilio circa la condizione dei dannati, si verifica un terremoto che causa lo svenimento di Dante:

Finito questo, la buia campagna  
tremò sì forte, che de lo spavento  
la mente di sudore ancor mi bagna.  
La terra lagrimosa diede vento,  
che balenò una luce vermiglia  
la qual mi vinse ciascun sentimento;  
e caddi come l'uom cui sonno piglia.

(3.130–36)

A questo punto né Dante Pellegrino si rende conto del significato del terremoto e dello svenimento né Dante Poeta offre al lettore alcuna spia per interpretare il testo. Poiché il poeta non spiega ora questi avvenimenti, al lettore non resta altro che continuare la lettura fino al momento in cui sarà possibile, partendo dal testo dantesco, offrire una spiegazione sia del terremoto che dello svenimento. Sappiamo tuttavia che è il terremoto, assieme con il vento e la luce vermiglia, a causare la perdita dei sensi del Pellegrino. La sua “caduta” (si noti il verbo usato dal poeta per descrivere le conseguenze dello svenimento) è uguagliata a quella dell'uomo che è vinto dal sonno: similitudine strana, questa, poiché non fa parte della nostra esperienza vedere un uomo cadere quand'è sopraffatto dal sonno; e quindi osservazione fondamentale per la valutazione del significato, per ora recondito, del terremoto e dello svenimento. È chiaro dunque che il fenomeno tellurico che scuote tutto il luogo infernale non può in definitiva essere preso in esame separatamente dallo svenimento, che tuttavia colpisce solo Dante Pellegrino. In realtà forse è possibile

speculare fin d'ora che la perdita dei sensi di Dante costituisca lo scopo fondamentale dello straordinario fenomeno tellurico.

La prima indicazione esplicita di un altro terremoto ci è data dalla bocca di Malacoda, nella quinta bolgia del cerchio ottavo (21.106–14). Vero è che Malacoda, pur non parlando di alcun terremoto in particolare, non solo descrive gli effetti rovinosi, causati da un gran terremoto, sul regno di Satana, ma ne offre anche le coordinate temporali per individuarne l'origine. Veniamo così a sapere che i ponti rotti, e presumibilmente anche le altre “ruine” che Dante aveva notato durante la sua discesa infernale, sono da rapportare alla crocifissione di Cristo e al fenomeno tellurico che l'accompagnò.

1. Il narrato biblico della morte di Cristo nel vangelo di Matteo ci offre gli elementi necessari per la spiegazione del terremoto infernale:

Et ecce velum templi scissum est in duas partes a summo usque deorsum: et terra mota est, et petrae scissae sunt, et monumenta aperta sunt: et multa corpora sanctorum, qui dormierant, surrexerunt. (Matt. 27.51–52)

Il narrato biblico e il testo dantesco giustificano ampiamente la proposta che il terremoto che accompagna la morte di Cristo sia lo stesso che causa le “ruine” nel regno di Satana. Infatti, alla morte di Cristo tiene dietro la sua discesa agli inferi: avvenimento, questo, che Virgilio stesso descrive a Dante, in seguito alla sua domanda, in termini precisi e rivelatori (4.52–63). Cristo, il “possente, / con segno di vittoria coronato,” si assoggetta non al peccato e a Satana ma alle conseguenze del peccato istigato da Satana stesso, cioè la morte; a questa sottomissione temporanea tiene dietro la vittoria di Cristo su Satana e sul suo regno. Di qui la “ruina” dei ponti e di altri luoghi infernali (5.28–36 e 12.4–10, secondo Charles S. Singleton 475) causati del terremoto, e la liberazione delle anime giuste dal Limbo tramite la discesa di Cristo agli inferi. Singleton scrive:

E se ora dalla fitta rete di tutti questi segni ci voltiamo a guardare la parola *tomba*, che compare verso la fine della salita per uscire dall'Inferno, essa assumerà per noi uno speciale significato. Lì indicava senza dubbio la tomba di Satana; ma quando il pellegrino esce da essa proprio prima dell'alba della Domenica di Pasqua, sarà difficile che il lettore cristiano non trovi in tale fatto una ricchezza di significato. (487–88)<sup>1</sup>

Senonché Singleton, nonostante gli stretti rapporti che egli sviluppa

fra la “discesa” di Cristo, subito dopo la morte in croce, e la “discesa” di Dante Pellegrino, non sembra mettere in luce ulteriori rapporti fra l’inizio di questi due viaggi infernali. Ciò che ci interessa sottolineare a questo punto è che l’inizio del viaggio dantesco, che segue di poco l’ora della morte di Cristo in croce, la sesta ora del Venerdì Santo (21.112–14), è appunto contrassegnato da un terremoto e dalla perdita dei sensi del Pellegrino: il fenomeno tellurico che scuote “la buia campagna” deve necessariamente rapportarsi al terremoto che accompagna la morte di Cristo in croce, alla quale occorre anche riferire la perdita dei sensi di Dante; infine, la discesa infernale di Dante Pellegrino che dalla sera del Venerdì Santo alla mattina della Domenica di Risurrezione è racchiuso nelle viscere della terra trova il suo modello mitico e la sua giustificazione soteriologica nel *Christuserlebnis*.

2. Prima di procedere all’analisi dei rapporti fra il *descensus ad inferos* di Cristo, preceduto dalla sua morte reale, e il *descensus ad inferos* di Dante, preceduto dal suo svenimento o morte simbolica, occorre considerare il terremoto dantesco nei suoi rapporti con il terremoto che nell’*Eneide*—testo fondamentale nella genesi della *Commedia*—caratterizza l’ingresso della Sibilla e di Enea nell’Ade:

Ecce autem primi sub lumina solis et ortus  
sub pedibus mugire solum et iuga coepta moveri  
silvarum, visaeque canes ululare per umbram,  
adventante dea.

(En. 6.255–58)

La formula che introduce il fenomeno—“ecce autem”—formula che ha un preciso corrispondente nel dantesco “Ed ecco” (3.82), è spesso usata per contraddistinguere avvenimenti improvvisi che determinano lo sviluppo d’un’azione e che causano paura o ammirazione (*Aeneidos* comm. ad loc.). In realtà tre elementi connotano il terremoto virgiliano: 1. il “muggire” del suolo sotto i piedi; 2. lo scuotersi delle vette degli alberi della foresta; 3. il latrare dei cani. Il primo e il terzo elemento sono convenzionali nella letteratura classica antica.<sup>2</sup> Il secondo e il terzo elemento virgiliano non caratterizzano l’ingresso infernale della *Commedia*, in cui il terremoto non viene descritto metaforicamente come in Virgilio (“mugire solum”) bensì in termini specifici e realistici (“la buia campagna / tremò sì forte”) con l’ag-

giunta di due elementi, estranei al testo dell'*Eneide*, e cioè il "vento" e "una luce vermiglia," che, secondo la meteorologia dantesca, sono costitutivi del fenomeno tellurico. In realtà anche qui è valido un principio interpretativo che a noi sembra fondamentale, pur nella sua evidente immediatezza: se è vero che, da un lato, le somiglianze testuali suggeriscono un contesto interpretativo generale (nella fattispecie, il terremoto virgiliano), dall'altro sono le disuguaglianze ad offrire la chiave d'interpretazione vera e propria.

Il terremoto, dunque, elemento comune in entrambi i testi, viene descritto in termini sostanzialmente diversi. Mentre in ambedue i casi il terremoto è da porsi in relazione con l'ingresso nell'aldilà, nell'*Eneide* l'eroe e la Sibilla non sono ancora entrati nella caverna infernale; al contrario, nella *Commedia* i due pellegrini sono già arrivati alla riva del fiume Acheronte. Inoltre il testo virgiliano suggerisce un rapporto, presumibilmente di dipendenza, fra il terremoto e la presenza della divinità ("adventante dea"); la *Commedia* non offre immediatamente un tale rapporto, ma è l'analisi di altri episodi danteschi in cui è presente il fenomeno tellurico a proporci l'episodio come una specifica manifestazione della divinità in un momento cruciale del viaggio di Dante Pellegrino (si veda *Inf.* 9.64-66).

Del tutto discriminante, per quanto concerne i due fenomeni tellurici, è la differenza nell'atteggiamento di Enea e di Dante di fronte al terremoto. Nell'*Eneide* al fenomeno tellurico tengono dietro il grido imperioso della Sibilla, diretto ai "profani," di allontanarsi; l'invito, rivolto ad Enea, di avanzare con la spada sguainata e con coraggio; e l'ingresso della Sibilla e dell'eroe nell'antro (6.258-63). Sebbene la Sibilla sproni l'eroe ad aver coraggio, in realtà l'eroe non sembra aver bisogno di alcuna esortazione, come esprime lucidamente 6.263 ("ille ducem haud timidus vadentem passibus aequat"). In questo contesto il testo della *Commedia* si stacca decisamente dal modello classico: il timore e la paura che si sono alternati nell'animo del Pellegrino fin dall'inizio del viaggio (1.6-7, 15, 19, ecc.), raggiungono in questa congiuntura un apice che Dante non oltrepasserà nemmeno quando si troverà davanti al "gran vermo," la più terrificante delle visioni infernali (34.22-27). Infatti il terremoto, il vento e la luce vermiglia vincono "ciascun sentimento" del Pellegrino che tramortisce. Quest'esperienza è così terrificante—nota lo scrittore—che il solo ricordo gli irriga ancora di sudore la fronte. In breve: l'at-

teggiamento di Enea di fronte al terremoto, al momento d'entrare nell'antro, mette in evidenza la "sufficienza" dell'eroe che intraprende il viaggio nell'aldilà, mentre al contrario l'atteggiamento di Dante è indice della sua "insufficienza."

La verifica di questa differenza fondamentale fra il viaggio nell'oltretomba di Dante Pellegrino e quello di Enea—viaggio di un cristiano, il primo; di un pagano, il secondo—è riscontrabile nel "segno" che permette all'uno e all'altro l'ingresso nell'aldilà. Nel poema virgiliano la Sibilla mostra a Caronte il *ramus aureus* (6.403-10) che Enea aveva raccolto nel bosco seguendo le istruzioni della maga. Nel poema dantesco, Virgilio, la guida assegnata al Pellegrino dalle tre donne sante, profferisce a Caronte non un dono materiale, per quanto pieno di valori simbolici, come nell'*Eneide* (si veda il commento serviano), bensì impone al nocchiere infernale un comando divino (3.94-96).

Di qui possiamo inferire ulteriori differenze fra i due *transitus* dell'Acheronte. Al profferire del ramo d'oro il Caronte virgiliano si calma; alle parole di Virgilio il Caronte dantesco tace ma ovviamente non s'acquieta. La diversità nella reazione dei due Caronti (e di qui diventa palese che si tratta proprio di due personaggi diversi) si manifesta anche nella trasformazione d'animo che si attua nel Caronte virgiliano. Questi non solo si rappacifica ("tumida ex ira tum corda residunt," 6.407), ma, per così dire, passa dalla parte di Enea, di cui ora ammira il dono venerabile, quella verga fatale che non vedeva più da lungo tempo (6.408-9). E quindi accoglie subito Enea nella barca. Il testo virgiliano sembra mettere ulteriormente in luce l'ammirazione di Caronte per Enea il quale, entrato nella barca, sovrasta gli astanti con la sua forma immane:

inde alias animas, quae per iuga longa sedebant,  
deturbat laxatque foros; simul accipit alveo  
ingentem Aeneam. gemuit sub pondere cumba  
sutilis et multam accepit rimosa paludem.  
tandem trans fluvium incolumis vatemque virumque  
informi limo glaucaque exponit in ulva.

(6.411-16)

Precisamente a motivo del *venerabile donum* o *virga fatalis*, non v'è più opposizione fra Enea ("corpus vivum") e Caronte, il quale accoglie l'eroe nella barca. Enea sembra così assumere una statura simile

o addirittura superiore ("ingentem Aeneam") a quella di Caronte, il quale infine depone incolumi ("incolumis"), al di là del fiume, la veggente e l'eroe.

Fondamentali sono quindi gli elementi che distinguono l'ingresso di Enea nell'aldilà dall'ingresso di Dante nell'Inferno: tramite il dono del ramo d'oro Caronte non solo viene messo a tacere ma sviluppa anche ammirazione per l'eroe; a parte il terremoto che accompagna l'appressarsi della dea all'antro infernale, nessun avvenimento straordinario caratterizza il passaggio dell'Acheronte virgiliano; Enea non teme né perde la conoscenza, anzi il suo passaggio dal regno dei vivi a quello dei morti è appunto contraddistinto da un continuo stato di coscienza e da una manifestazione di superiorità verso gli astanti o le circostanze esteriori, come è palese dalla descrizione di Enea, ritto sulla barca, durante il tragitto e dal suo arrivo, incolume, sull'altra sponda.

Contrariamente ad Enea, il Pellegrino perde la conoscenza e tramortisce, esperisce quindi nella propria persona i segni della morte.<sup>3</sup> Nell'*Eneide*, da un lato, il valore discriminante assoluto che permette il passaggio è la contrapposizione fra *corpora viva* e *corpora morta*, che la necessità della sepoltura mette ancor più in rilievo. Nella *Commedia*, dall'altro, la sepoltura dei corpi non ha più nessun valore determinante nella scelta di Caronte, che accoglie nella barca tutti coloro che "cadono" lungo la riva dell'Acheronte. Per Caronte ciò che determina il passaggio dell'Acheronte, passaggio non invocato come nell'*Eneide* ("stabant orantes primi transmittere cursum / tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore," 6.314-5) ma temuto e odiato, è la condizione stessa dell'anima: prava e morta nell'ira di Dio.

Nel contesto del passaggio dell'Acheronte, la contiguità tematica del testo dantesco e virgiliano rivela a prima vista una comunanza di elementi contenutistici e di motivi poetici. In realtà le differenze, ovvie, implicite o recondite, sono tali e di così gran valore da mettere in luce un fatto macroscopico, rimasto nascosto solo a chi nella *Commedia* è in cerca di elementi formali a parte dei suoi significati spirituali: l'*auctor* vuole infatti segnalare, tramite l'imitazione contrapposta a una differenziazione sistematica, che il viaggio dantesco si attualizza per cause e scopi completamente diversi da quelli del viaggio di Enea. Quindi la differenza fra il primo e il secon-

do è fondamentale, e le molteplici spie del testo dantesco rivelano il concetto fondamentale alla base di questa sostanziale differenza: Dante Pellegrino sta per intraprendere il viaggio nell'aldilà in virtù d'un privilegio la cui origine s'affonda nel mistero di Cristo il cui *descensus/ascensus* Dante s'accinge ora ad imitare.

3. Nella Bibbia il terremoto e gli altri avvenimenti che accompagnano la morte di Cristo non possono essere visti che come una manifestazione della divinità. Tremori, tuoni, folgori, oscuramenti caratterizzano in genere il giorno del Signore, le teofanie, come la manifestazione divina a Mosè sul monte Sinai, e i due avvenimenti escatologici per eccellenza, ambedue visti in diretta dipendenza con la morte di Cristo: la distruzione di Gerusalemme e la fine del mondo.

Quali manifestazioni della divinità, cui sono sottomesse le forze della natura, nella Bibbia il terremoto, il vento e la folgore incutono timore nell'uomo (si veda la reazione del centurione ai piedi della croce); nella *Commedia*, come s'è visto, avvenimenti simili connotano la presa di possesso di Cristo sul regno di Satana e, di qui, altri eventi connessi con il viaggio dantesco o la salvezza delle anime purganti: la venuta del messaggero per aprire le porte della città di Dite (*Inferno* 9) e l'annuncio della purificazione delle anime purganti, come viene illustrato dalla liberazione di Stazio (*Purgatorio* 20).<sup>4</sup>

Nel terzo canto dell'*Inferno*, il terremoto che scuote la campagna sembra dover interpretarsi non solo quale teofania in genere bensì quale manifestazione della potenza divina che si rivelò alla morte di Cristo e alla presa di possesso del regno di Satana e che caratterizzerà anche la fine dei tempi, quando Cristo ritornerà per giudicare i vivi e i morti. Entro questo contesto, dunque, l'ingresso di Dante nell'oltretomba e nel regno di Satana, come tutto il viaggio dantesco, va interpretato come manifestazione diretta della volontà divina, secondo quanto le anime dannate e purganti si sentono proclamare più e più volte da Virgilio e da Dante. In quanto manifestazione della volontà divina, questa discesa nell'*Inferno* è configurata secondo l'archetipo del *descensus* di Cristo, il "possente / con segno di vittoria coronato," il primo fra i redenti, il Signore della vita e della morte.

Il *descensus* di Dante, quindi, situato entro questo contesto escatologico, è quello dell'uomo peccatore che, per raggiungere la salvezza, deve imitare Cristo nella sua morte e nella sua discesa agli inferi. È quanto dice Beatrice stessa nel suo primo incontro con Dante in cima alla montagna del Purgatorio e in una fondamentale digressione teologica in Paradiso:

Tanto giù cadde, che tutti argomenti  
a la salute sua eran già corti,  
fuor che mostrarli le perdute genti.

Per questo visitai l'uscio d'i morti,  
e a colui che l'ha qua sù condotto,  
li preghi miei, piangendo, furon porti.

(*Purg.* 30.136-41)

La pena dunque che la croce porse  
s'a la natura assunta sì misura,  
nulla già mai sì giustamente morse;  
e così nulla fu di tanta ingiura,  
guardando alla persona che sofferse,  
in che era contratta tal natura.

Però d'un atto uscir cose diverse:  
ch'a Dio ed a' Giudei piacque una morte;  
per lei tremò la terra e 'l ciel s'aperse.

(*Par.* 7.40-48)

Quale momento essenziale della sua *imitatio* di Cristo, anche Dante, nel suo *descensus* nell'aldilà, non può non esperire la morte, la quale, come conseguenza della colpa originale, del peccato individuale e *conditio sine qua non* per l'ingresso nell'oltretomba, si attualizza nella perdita della conoscenza e nella caduta (paragonata al sonno) del Pellegrino.

Il nesso fondamentale che esiste fra il terremoto infernale e il terremoto narrato dall'evangelista Matteo, fra lo svenimento del Pellegrino e la morte di Cristo, determina il contesto entro cui vanno anche situati gli avvenimenti che tengono dietro al terremoto, allo svenimento di Dante e al passaggio dell'Acheronte.

Dopo la morte Cristo è sepolto, discende agli inferi, risorge e ascende quindi alla destra del Padre, da dove ritornerà alla fine dei tempi per giudicare i vivi e i morti. Cristo dunque non solo entra nell'aldilà ma inaugura i tempi messianici e annuncia anche la parusia.<sup>5</sup> Dante che attraversa l'Acheronte e inizia un viaggio nel



regno dei morti—*transitus* e viaggio caratterizzati da tipici segni apocalittici come terremoto, vento e folgore—lascia dunque dietro di sé l'*aevum praesens* ed entra in quello stato che è proprio dell'uomo dopo la morte. Osservazione ovvia, questa, ma fondamentale: la visione dantesca dell'Inferno, Purgatorio e Paradiso si svolge nell'aldilà, inteso e descritto come entità spaziale e temporale essenzialmente diversa dal mondo in cui viviamo. Questo è infatti l'argomento della *Commedia*, secondo quanto leggiamo nella lettera a Can Grande della Scala (12.2). Gli avvenimenti connessi con il passaggio dell'Acheronte caratterizzano l'ingresso di Dante Pellegrino nell'aldilà, inteso come entità spaziale e temporale e distinguono il narrato dei primi tre canti dal resto della *Commedia*. Il narrato pre-acheronteo—cioè lo smarrimento nella selva, l'incontro con Virgilio e la visione degli ignavi—fa ancora parte di questo mondo e di questo tempo;<sup>6</sup> quanto avviene dopo il passaggio dell'Acheronte costituisce la visione dantesca. L'Acheronte quindi separa questo mondo dall'altro, il tempo presente dall'eternità, la realtà terrena dalla visione.<sup>7</sup>

4. Soffermiamoci su quest'ultima proposta—l'Acheronte separa la realtà dalla visione—al fine di confrontare i moduli narrativi della *Commedia* con quelli biblici. Il *descensus ad inferos* di Cristo realizza due valori fondamentali: il trionfo sulla morte e su Satana, che si verifica in termini assoluti e universali, e in quanto tale ha luogo alla morte e alla risurrezione di Cristo (Iannucci 51–81). Ma esso si verifica in termini individuali per ogni creatura che accetta Cristo e la morte con la speranza della risurrezione, accettazione che è la *conditio sine qua non* perchè la creatura possa risorgere. Dante Pellegrino deve quindi “morire” per poter ricevere la grazia della risurrezione. Lo svenimento fa sì che Dante diventi partecipe della mortalità che è comune a tutte le creature e pone quindi le condizioni necessarie per ricevere la grazia della risurrezione.

L'analisi dei testi biblici che narrano la morte di Cristo mette in luce ulteriori rapporti con il testo dantesco. Dei quattro vangeli, quello di Matteo descrive il maggior numero di circostanze, incluso il terremoto, che accompagnano la morte di Cristo. Nel vangelo, per ordine, abbiamo i seguenti elementi: le tenebre, descritte con una precisa indicazione temporale (27.45); la morte di Cristo (27.46–50);

i *signa* della morte, cioè lo spezzarsi del velo del tempio, il terremoto, l'apertura dei monumenti e la risurrezione di molti santi, il timore e l'affermazione di fede del centurione e degli astanti (27.51-54). Questi *signa* connotano la straordinarietà dell'evento e la presenza della divinità. Ciò che ci preme sottolineare ora è la sequenza temporale che li caratterizza. Abbiamo appunto, per ordine, prima le tenebre, poi la morte di Cristo, subito dopo il terremoto e gli altri segni che causano il timore degli astanti. Conclusione dell'episodio è la sepoltura di Cristo.

Il confronto con il testo dantesco rivela, per quanto concerne la cronologia degli avvenimenti, elementi simili e dissimili d'importanza fondamentali. Innanzitutto anche nella *Commedia*, come in Matteo, le tenebre avvolgono il luogo, come il testo sottolinea a più riprese sia all'inizio del canto ("l'aere senza stelle," 3.23) come all'appressarsi all'Acheronte ("com'i' discerno per lo fioco lume," 3.75) e, ancor più esplicitamente, durante la sosta presso il fiume (3.87, 130; 4.10). Senonché, mentre le tenebre che scendono sul Golgota costituiscono un elemento straordinario—tutti e tre i sinottici concordano su questo fatto sottolineandone l'ora (Matt. 27.45; Marco 15.37; Luca 23.44)—nell'*Inferno* dantesco l'oscurità è presentata come caratteristica essenziale del "cieco mondo" (4.13), da rapportarsi quindi al peccato che è all'origine della creazione stessa dell'*Inferno* e della dannazione delle anime. Tuttavia è precisamente in questo rapporto essenziale fra tenebre e peccato che il testo evangelico e quello dantesco concordano, ovviamente entro un contesto simbolico o simbolico-teologico. Infatti, per quanto concerne le tenebre dei sinottici, il sole s'oscura per esprimere il dolore causato dalla morte del creatore ed anche per significare il peccato che è la causa della morte di Cristo.<sup>8</sup>

Il terremoto ha luogo dopo le parole di Virgilio (3.121-29), il quale spiega a Dante a) la condizione di quelli che muoiono nell'ira di Dio i quali discendono tutti all'Acheronte; b) il desiderio dei dannati di attraversare l'Acheronte, spronati dalla giustizia divina; c) e il motivo delle rimostanze di Caronte nei confronti di Dante. Il terremoto quindi va posto entro il contesto stabilito dalle parole di Virgilio, il quale qui annuncia la giustizia divina in atto nell'*Inferno* e poco dopo, nel canto seguente, descrive la discesa di Cristo nel Limbo quale "un possente, / con segno di vittoria coronato."

Poiché il terremoto è segno della giustizia divina e manifestazione terribile della divinità, è possibile comprendere ciò che avviene al Pellegrino al suo verificarsi: egli infatti, spaventato e sopraffatto a tal punto da perdere "ciascun sentimento," cade "come l'uom cui sonno piglia." Lo spavento di Dante è simile al timore dei profeti dell'Antico Testamento davanti alla manifestazione della divinità, al timore dei tre discepoli testimoni della trasfigurazione di Cristo e alla paura del centurione e degli altri che assistono alla morte di Cristo e ai segni straordinari che vi tengono dietro.

Dante sviene non solo perché la divinità manifesta la sua grandezza e terribilità, ma anche perché, davanti alla divinità, la creatura si rende conto della debolezza della propria natura, colpita dal peccato di Adamo e dal peccato personale. Ambedue gli aspetti sono presenti: prima, la debolezza della creatura dopo il peccato di Adamo, messa in evidenza dal verso "mi vinse ciascun sentimento"; poi, la peccaminosità del Pellegrino, sottolineata dalla caduta: "e caddi come l'uom cui sonno piglia." La sopraffazione dei sentimenti del Pellegrino è segno di quella profonda dicotomia effettuata in ogni discendente di Adamo come conseguenza diretta del peccato, per cui le forze superiori dell'uomo, l'anima e la mente, non solo non sono in grado di dominare le forze inferiori, cioè il corpo, ma esse stesse possono venir meno. La conseguenza più tragica di questa dicotomia inerente alla natura umana è appunto la morte.<sup>9</sup> La perdita dei sensi di Dante, che ha la sua manifestazione esterna nella caduta, rivela la comunanza del Pellegrino con il resto dell'umanità negli effetti del peccato di Adamo e nella partecipazione personale al peccato.

La caduta "fisica" di Dante ha un antecedente mitico di fondamentale importanza teologica nella caduta dal cielo di Lucifero, come afferma Beatrice nell'ultimo sintagma del verbo "cadere" riscontrabile nella *Commedia*:

Principio del cader fu il maladetto  
superbir di colui che tu vedesti  
da tutti i pesi del mondo costretto.

(Par. 29.55-57)

Prefigurata in quella di Lucifero e di Adamo, la caduta di Dante sulla riva dell'Acheronte, il fiume della morte, è emblematica della debolezza della natura umana in genere e della peccaminosità del Pellegrino in particolare.

Questa è dunque la condizione di Dante Pellegrino a questa congiuntura del viaggio. Arrivato all'Acheronte, il fiume della morte che separa questo mondo dall'aldilà, Dante si sente proclamare da Caronte che non gli è permesso di attraversare il fiume in quanto è "anima viva," cioè suscettibile di pentimento e quindi disponibile alla salvezza. A questo momento la divinità si manifesta nella sua terribilità, proclamando quindi di nuovo il suo dominio sopra il regno di Satana e mettendo in evidenza la debolezza del Pellegrino, soggetto al peccato di Adamo e responsabile della propria condizione peccaminosa. La condizione di Dante Pellegrino in seguito alla perdita della conoscenza, quindi, per alcuni aspetti è simile a quella di Cristo morto, per altri se ne discosta sostanzialmente. Cristo, pur essendo innocente, si assoggetta volontariamente alla morte, conseguenza del peccato; Dante Pellegrino, benché non muoia fisicamente, esperisce tuttavia temporaneamente la perdita delle sue facoltà fisiche e intellettuali a causa della propria condizione di peccatore. Cristo, dopo la morte, discende agli inferi, ne prende dominio e libera le anime dei giusti dal Limbo; dopo lo svenimento emblematico della morte, Dante può iniziare il viaggio infernale grazie alla discesa di Cristo e alla sua presa di possesso del regno di Satana.

La morte di Cristo implica nel contempo la sua sottomissione, breve e temporanea, al regno di Satana, sotto il cui dominio si trova l'uomo soggetto al peccato di Adamo e al peccato personale. Lo svenimento di Dante assolve una funzione analoga alla morte di Cristo. Se, da un lato, il Pellegrino può contare fin dall'inizio del viaggio sull'intervento divino, dall'altro non può non condividere, per quanto brevemente, la sconfitta esperita da Cristo stesso e sottomettersi quindi alle forze del male e della morte.

5. Fondamentale, per l'esatta comprensione dell'intero episodio acheronteo, è l'esplicitazione dei motivi poetici sottesi alla decisione di Dante *auctor* di passare sotto silenzio non solo il modo (ed è proprio il "modo" del passaggio ad interessare quasi esclusivamente i critici) ma l'azione stessa del *transitus*. In altri termini, la questione che ora intendiamo affrontare brevemente concerne i motivi teologici e poetici che hanno motivato Dante *auctor*, che narra tutti gli altri *transitus* del Pellegrino, compreso quello che il Pellegrino, benché immerso nel sonno, attua passivamente per opera di Lucia durante

la prima notte purgatoriale, a lasciare nel silenzio narrativo questo primo e fondamentale passaggio. La glossa dei commentatori antichi (Terpening 127-39), salvo qualche raro spunto, non ha fatto altro che sottolineare le difficoltà interpretative di questo silenzio poetico; i critici contemporanei, nonostante le molteplici implicazioni estetiche di questo silenzio narrativo, hanno trascurato del tutto questa questione.<sup>10</sup>

In realtà il motivo fondamentale del silenzio poetico dantesco che investe il passaggio acheronteo del Pellegrino va situato nel contesto biblico e teologico esposto sopra, contesto che occorre illuminare ulteriormente tramite una serie di riflessioni derivanti dai molteplici rapporti esistenti fra *verbum* e *silentium*.

La Bibbia, alla morte di Cristo, sottolinea incisivamente da un'ultima emissione di voce ("Iesus autem iterum clamans voce magna, emisit spiritum," Matt. 27.50) e alla sua sepoltura, passa sotto silenzio la condizione di Cristo da quel momento fino all'alba della domenica di resurrezione. Gli scrittori sacri infatti non descrivono che cosa avviene a Cristo durante quel periodo che nella liturgia viene chiamato triduo sacro. È proprio questo silenzio narrativo degli autori sacri ad indurre gli scrittori degli apocrifi ad amplificare il testo biblico descrivendo il *descensus ad inferos*.

Al silenzio narrativo biblico corrisponde il silenzio liturgico con cui la Chiesa commemora la morte di Cristo durante la liturgia del Venerdì e del Sabato Santo. La lettura del *Passio*, infatti, viene interrotta per commemorare in silenzio la morte di Cristo.<sup>11</sup> Inoltre, nella tradizione giudeo-cristiana due elementi, apparentemente contraddittori ma in realtà integrantisi, coesistono all'interno della concezione della divinità. Dio è *logos* e *sigé*, *verbum* e *silentium*. Se è vero che nel tempo Egli rivela se stesso tramite la parola, tuttavia Egli continua a manifestarsi anche nel silenzio. La creatura, in pellegrinaggio verso la patria celeste, si accosta alla divinità tramite il *verbum* e il silenzio della stessa nei suoi rapporti con la creatura. La divinità, insomma, si configura non solo come *deus revelatus* ma anche come *deus absconditus*: ambedue gli aspetti condizionano il dialogo con la creatura.<sup>12</sup> In breve, il silenzio poetico a riguardo del *transitus* dell'Acheronte va situato in un contesto assai complesso, che deriva da varie tradizioni con cui il testo dantesco intreccia molteplici rapporti.<sup>13</sup> Occorre dunque pensare alla divinità in quanto

*deus absconditus* e *silentium*; al silenzio che accompagna la morte di Cristo nel narrato biblico e che caratterizza l'attuazione liturgica della morte di Cristo nella preghiera della Chiesa; al mistero che avvolge il passaggio da questa vita all'altra.

Al di là di questa reticolo di rapporti occorre sottolineare il modo in cui il *verbum* si adegua al *factum* poetico. Infatti è la perdita dei sensi del Pellegrino, cioè la realtà poetica che Dante vuole esprimere, a determinare la poesia, che così diventa "muta" o "morta" (si veda *Purg.* 1.7). Per quanto concerne il testo dantesco occorre sottolineare la condizione peculiare del Pellegrino durante il *transitus*. Poiché ha perso i sensi, non può sapere in qual modo abbia varcato l'Acheronte. Conseguentemente Dante *auctor* non descrive il passaggio del fiume proprio perché, non atteggiandosi ad autore onnisciente, non può sapere come esso sia avvenuto né può quindi descriverlo. Il silenzio narrativo che avvolge il passaggio dell'Acheronte deriva quindi dalla mancata comprensione dell'evento, incomprendimento da parte dell'*agens* che l'*auctor* deve necessariamente rispettare, per motivi intrinseci ed estrinseci, quando narra l'evento *post factum*, cioè al termine del viaggio nell'aldilà. Questo silenzio poetico va quindi situato all'interno della concezione medievale del *verbum*, che San Tommaso esprime lucidamente:

Manifestius autem et communius in nobis dicitur verbum quod voce profertur. Quod quidem ab interiori procedit quantum ad duo quae in verbo exteriori inveniuntur, scilicet vox ipsa, et significatio vocis. Vox enim significat intellectus conceptum, secundum Philosophum, in libro I *Periherm.* [Bekker 16a3]: et iterum vox ex imaginatione procedit, ut in libro *De anima* [Bekker 420b32] dicitur. Vox autem quae non est significativa, verbum dici non potest. Ex hoc ergo dicitur verbum vox exterior, quia significat interiorem mentis conceptum. Sic igitur primo et principaliter interior mentis conceptus verbum dicitur: secundario vero, ipsa vox interioris conceptus significativa: tertio vero, ipsa imaginatio vocis verbum dicitur. Et hos tres modos verbi ponit Damascenus [*De fide orth.*: MG 94, 857], in I libro, cap. 13, dicens quod *verbum dicitur naturalis intellectus motus, secundum quem movetur et intelligit et cogitat, velut lux et splendor*, quantum ad primum: *rursus verbum est quod non verbo profertur, sed in corde pronuntiatur*, quantum ad tertium: *rursus etiam verbum est angelus*, idest nuntius, *intelligentiae*, quantum ad secundum.—Dicitur autem figurative quarto modo verbum, id quod verbo significatur vel efficitur: sicut consuevimus dicere, *hoc est verbum quod dixi tibi*. . . . (*STh.* 1 q. 34 a. 1, *Respondeo*)<sup>14</sup>

Nel contesto, quindi, di queste riflessioni tomistiche circa il *verbum*, è possibile delucidare ulteriormente il significato dello svenimento del Pellegrino e il silenzio poetico circa il passaggio acheronteo. Il Pellegrino sviene perché è incapace di comprendere questo momento essenziale del passaggio da questo mondo all'aldilà:<sup>15</sup> non solo il modo ma anche, e soprattutto, il significato del viaggio che sta per intraprendere. Non può comprendere perché è immerso nel peccato, cioè "sonno" o privazione dei sensi, che caratterizza, rispettivamente, il suo ingresso nella selva oscura e il passaggio del fiume. Appunto perché è immerso nel peccato, sonno interiore o privazione dei sensi, non può comprendere ciò che la divinità sta attuando in lui tramite il viaggio nell'aldilà. All'incomprensione dell'intelletto segue necessariamente il silenzio circa l'evento stesso.

Come al *conceptus intellectus* corrisponde prima il *verbum* mentale e poi il *verbum* o *vox exterior*, alla mancata comprensione di un evento da parte dell'intelletto non può corrispondere che il *silentium* mentale e quindi il silenzio narrativo o poetico quale unica adeguata corrispondenza fra realtà e forma espressiva. Incomprensione e silenzio, quindi, essenzialmente connessi con lo smarrimento e sonno descritti all'inizio del viaggio nel primo canto dell'*Inferno* e con lo svenimento e la caduta di Dante Pellegrino lungo la riva dell'Acheronte. Questa negatività—morale, intellettuale, verbale—si trasforma nell'assenza del narrato. Questo silenzio narrativo, tuttavia, assume immediatamente a funzione poetica estremamente efficace: non solo perché esso è l'unico mezzo disponibile all'*auctor* ma anche, e soprattutto, perché questa "morte" della poesia esprime in forma poetica perfettamente adeguata l'incomprensione dell'evento da parte dell'*agens* e la sua morte spirituale.<sup>16</sup>

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## NOTE

- 1 Charles S. Singleton, nel saggio "Le visuali retrospettive," sviluppa una valida analisi delle tre "ruine," partendo dalla terza, quella annunciata da Malacoda, e ponendole appunto nel contesto della morte di Cristo e del terremoto che ne consegue: "Tutte e tre sono prove del fendersi delle rocce in quel gran momento del calendario cristiano in cui il Redentore morì sulla Croce. È così che l'*Inferno* attesta quella Morte che è la nostra salvezza dalla seconda morte: le

tre *ruine* marcano quel momento, imprimeandone nella roccia dell'*Inferno* tre eterni segnali" (*La poesia* 481). Singleton conclude la sua analisi sviluppando un rapporto stretto fra le tre "ruine" quali eterni segnali impressi nella roccia dell'*inferno* non solo, come è ovvio, con la morte di Cristo ma anche con l'inizio del viaggio dantesco. La "discesa," infatti, inizia verso l'imbrunire (si veda *Inf.* 2.1-2), Dante e Virgilio raggiungono il centro della terra circa le sei di sera del Sabato Santo (Singleton 487), iniziano la scalata verso il Monte Purgatorio verso le 7,30 del Sabato Santo, a causa dell'anticipazione di dodici ore (Singleton 487), e raggiungono le sponde della montagna sacra la mattina della Domenica di Pasqua.

- 2 R. G. Austin definisce il primo elemento "A conventional detail" (*Aeneidos* 113; n. al v. 256) e rimanda a *En.* 4.490-91 ("mugire videbis / sub pedibus terram et descendere montibus ornos") e a Ovidio, *Metam.* 14.409-10 ("lapides visi mugitus edere raucos / et latrare canes"). Austin fa altri riferimenti per il latrare dei cani nella sua nota.
- 3 Ulteriori differenze risultano dall'analisi dei sintagmi connotativi, nel testo virgiliano e dantesco, della condizione di Enea, Dante e delle anime. Nell'*Eneide* abbiamo in riferimento ad Enea e ai morti: "corpora viva nefas Stygia vectare carina" (6.391); "ingentem Aenea" (6.413); "et ferruginea [Charon] subvectat corpora cumba" (6.303); "matres atque viri defunctaque corpora vita magnanimum heroum" (6.306-7); "animae" (6.319). Nel testo dantesco i sintagmi seguenti sono connotativi della condizione privilegiata del Pellegrino, chiamato da Caronte "anima viva" (3:88) e, indirettamente e implicitamente, da Virgilio "anima buona" (3.127); le anime dei dannati, al contrario, sono chiamate "anime prave" (3.84), "morti" (3.89), "anime . . . lasse e nude" (3.100), "il mal seme d'Adamo" (3.115), "quelli che muoion ne l'ira di Dio" (3.122).
- 4 Un'analisi del terremoto in *Inferno* 3 e *Purgatorio* 20-21 mette chiaramente in evidenza che il primo è annunciatore di morte mentre il secondo è annunciatore di vita: ambedue derivanti il loro valore dall'evento cristologico.
- 5 *La Sainte bible*: Mt 27.51 nota o; Mt 24.1 nota d.
- 6 Il narrato virgiliano della visita di Beatrice nel Limbo appartiene, come è ovvio, all'antefatto della storia ed è situato, spazialmente e temporalmente, nel Limbo, cioè nell'aldilà.
- 7 Questa concezione, l'Acheronte quale divisione fra evo presente e l'aldilà, è proposta, per quanto implicitamente, da Charles S. Singleton: "In un certo senso, si potrebbe desiderare che alla fine del secondo canto dell'*Inferno* calasse un sipario, per distinguere da ciò che segue il prologo del poema costituito dai primi due canti" (*La poesia* 26).
- 8 "... factae sunt tenebrae . . . in signum futurarum tenebrarum, quae comprehensurae erant gentem Iudaeam. . . sub Christo autem factae sunt tenebrae super omnem terram Iudaeam tribus horis: quoniam propter peccata sua privati sunt a lumine Dei Patris, et a splendore Christi, et ab illuminatione Spiritus sancti" (S. Tommaso, *Catena aurea* 1: 451; Matt. 27).
- 9 "... naturali morte moriuntur omnes communiter, tam nocentes quam inno-



centes. Quae quidem naturalis mors divina potestate inducitur propter peccatum originale; secundum illud 1 Reg. 2.6: Dominus mortificat et vivificat" (*STh* 1a 2ae, q. 94, a. 5 ad 2).

- 10 Secondo R. Hollander, Dante *auctor* avrebbe deciso di passare sotto silenzio il passaggio acheronteo perché la narrazione sarebbe risultata "too self-consciously redolent" del passaggio acheronteo di Enea (292 n. 5).
- 11 "Et inclinato capite tradidit spiritum. (*Hic genu flectitur, et pausatur aliquantulum.*)" (*Missale Romanum* 153). Nella liturgia del venerdì santo si veda anche: "Finito Tractu, dicitur Passio super nudum pulpitem: quam Celebrans submissa voce legit in cornu Epistolae" (*Missale Romanum* 150). "Non dicitur 'Corpus tuum, Domine', nec Postcommunio, nec 'Placeat tibi', nec datur benedictio: sed facta reverentia Altari, Sacerdos cum Ministris discedit: et dicuntur Vesperae sine cantu, et denudatur Altare" (*Missale Romanum* 160). Parimenti viene anche sospeso il suono delle campane.
- 12 Per una discussione del silenzio nella Bibbia si veda la voce "Silenzio" nel *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, dove si nota che nella Bibbia il silenzio è indice della collera divina (Ez. 3.26), segno di punizione (Is. 64.11), allontanamento del Signore (Ps. 35.22), "un arrêt de mort" (Ps. 28.1), e annunzia lo Sheol, dove Dio e l'uomo non si parlano più (Ps. 94.17; 115.17). Per una trattazione più ampia e generale rimando al volume di Gustav Mensching. In chiave moderna, e nel contesto di una trattazione generale della retorica come "filosofia postfilosofica," fondamentali sono le pagine di Paolo Valesio, soprattutto 353-97.
- 13 Occorre anche accennare ad un contesto che è basato su motivi psicologici. Se è vero, come si è proposto sopra, che la caduta-svenimento di Dante è da interpretarsi anche come una forma di morte fisica, allora è possibile proporre che il silenzio poetico sottolinei il mistero che avvolge la morte di ogni uomo: mentre la vita terrena, sperimentata e sperimentabile, può essere descritta tramite i mezzi verbali disponibili e l'esperienza dell'aldilà presenta problemi di comunicazione variamente risolvibili, il passaggio dalla prima alla seconda potrebbe non sembrare riducibile ai mezzi espressivi che pertengono a queste due esperienze.
- 14 Si veda anche: "Si autem dicitur verbum quia exterius manifestat, ea quae exterius manifestant, non dicuntur verba nisi inquantum significant interiorem mentis conceptum, quem aliquis etiam per exteriora signa manifestat" (*STh*. 1 q. 34 a. 1, *Ad primum*). "Cum ergo dicitur quod verbum est notitia, non accipitur notitia pro actu intellectus cognoscentis, vel pro aliquo eius habitu: sed pro eo quod intellectus concipit cognoscendo. Unde et Augustinus dicit quod Verbum est sapientia genita: quod nihil aliud est quod ipsa conceptio sapientis: quae ipsa pari modo notitia genita dici potest" (*STh*. 1 q. 34 a. 1, *Ad secundum*). "Nam intelligere importat solam habitudinem intelligentis ad rem intellectam. . . . Sed dicere importat principaliter habitudinem ad verbum conceptum: nihil enim est aliud dicere quam proferre verbum. Sed mediante verbum importat habitudinem ad rem intellectam, quae in verbo prolato

- manifestatur intelligenti" (*STh.* 1 q. 34. a 1, *Ad tertium*).
- 15 Su questa incomprensione si veda quanto ho scritto in *Dante's Poetry of Dreams* cap. 5, in riferimento anche agli altri sonni e perdite di coscienza di Dante.
- 16 Come lo svenimento del Pellegrino è stato posto in relazione con il "sonno," causa dello smarrimento nella selva oscura, anche il silenzio narrativo che avvolge il passaggio dell'Acheronte è annunciato dalla incapacità o difficoltà di Dante *auctor* a descrivere la foresta ("Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura / esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte," *Inf.* 1.4-5) o a spiegare come Dante vi sia entrato ("Io non so ben ridir com'ì v'entrai," *Inf.* 1.10). In altra sede intendo ritornare più ampiamente sul valore di questo silenzio poetico nel contesto di tutta la *Commedia* e nei suoi molteplici rapporti con la parola umana e il verbo divino.

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## Dante's Broken Faith: The Sin of the Second Circle\*

Dante, se tu nell'amorosa spera  
com'io credo, dimori . . .

Boccaccio, *Rime* 102

### Preliminaries

We now distinguish between Dante, the poet of the *Divine Comedy*, and Dante, the 'pilgrim' in the *Divine Comedy*. Our critical terms are alliterative, mnemonic, and they reflect an inveterate and justified habit of reading that makes us doctrinally wary of seeing a poet in his poem as anything more than a persona, or mask.<sup>1</sup> Yet the *Commedia* resists this reading. More than any other long poem in the European epic tradition it seems to proclaim that the poet of the poem is the poet in the poem. We begin our reading of the poem with the first words of the *Inferno*:

Nel mezzo del camin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura . . .

This is the poem which Dante presented to Can Grande della Scala; it began with an *Incipit* and the name of its author. "Here begins the *Commedia* of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth but not in character."<sup>2</sup> And in this same letter he insists on the reality of the experience his poem commemorates. In the poem itself and at the summit of the Mount of Purgatory, Beatrice names the poet who had been recognized only as a Florentine up to that point. Here, Dante records her "Dante"—"out of necessity"—that is, as a part of his history of the experience of a week in the middle of his life (*Purg.* 30.55).

And the way announced in the opening of the *Inferno* is clearly no longer the way of *our* life, for at this point of the *Commedia* it has narrowed to become a path that only Dante can take. At this

moment on top of the Mount of Purgatory Dante has left both Virgil and Statius behind. As Singleton puts it in his commentary to this passage: "Dante's confession to Beatrice, mainly made indirectly through her charges in this canto and the next, is a *personal* confession."<sup>3</sup> Then, there is the remarkable presence of Dante's early lyric poetry in the *Commedia*. Beginning with Francesca's adaptation of his "amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa" (*Vita Nuova* 20) for her short lyric history of her own love for Paolo ("Amor ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende," *Inf.* 5.100–107), the "pilgrim" of the *Commedia* confronts the poetry of the poet of the *Commedia*, as the poet integrates his own early life into his poem. The *Vita Nuova* is new in the *Commedia*.

A reading of the *Commedia* from its first line to Dante's encounter with Cunizza and Folco of Marseilles (*Paradiso* 9) discloses a mode of writing that can only be called confessional, since it is in fact a version of the confession that Beatrice demands of Dante and that Dante gives at the end of the *Purgatorio*—*tua confession* (31.6). The confession Beatrice hears then is the confession Dante has already uttered in a faint and nearly inaudible voice in his description of the second circle of Hell. He has prepared for it by his choice of the words *selva oscura* at the beginning of the *Inferno*. From this muted allusion to the relation between Aeneas and Dido,<sup>4</sup> which is unintelligible at the beginning of the poem, his reader can follow his confession of his own infidelity to Beatrice, down into the second circle of the *Inferno*, up the Mount of Purgatory to the terrace of the amorous (cantos 25 and 26) to his meeting with Beatrice at the end of the *Purgatorio*; and from there ascend to the sphere of Venus and the valediction to this personal theme in the parting words of Folco of Marseilles in *Paradiso* 9, where the sin of the second circle is remembered, even as it is forgotten in a parting smile (*Par.* 9.103–105). Let us hear this confession, which is both that of the pilgrim in the *Commedia* and the maker of the *Commedia*.

## The Second Circle

We descend from these general considerations into the *Inferno* itself and into the second circle. The scene is so familiar that it needs to be recalled. In the second circle we have left the quiet and the light of Limbo, and here we discover the monstrous Minos. He judges the

damned souls, and his tail, as it coils around his own body, indicates to which circle of the narrowing funnel of Hell the damned soul must descend (5.4–12). The spirits condemned to the second circle are driven by a hellish storm that allows them no rest (“la buffera infernal che mai non resta,” 31) and that is the expression of their inner passions. They are driven by a “ruin,” which remains unexplained, but which intensifies their tumult (34–36). Dante recognizes these lost spirits as the carnal sinners, and their movements are described by two bird similes, one of which will have a long life in the poem. They are compared first to starlings, caught in the winds of winter, then to cranes driven south in a long line across the skies, trailing their grief in their flight (40–42).

It is Virgil who picks out for Dante a group of seven sinners (58–78), but significantly it is Dante whose attraction is captured by a pair of spirits “that go together and seem so light on the wind” (73–75). They respond to Dante’s call “as doves summoned by desire” (83), and one of them, Francesca, relates her story to Dante, first in a poem of eight lines (100–107, reproduced in the Annex to this essay), and then at greater length (121–138). And in response Dante falls, “as a dead body falls” (“come corpo morto cade,” 142). This is the scene of the second circle and canto 5 of the *Inferno* in outline.

What an outline does not reveal is Dante’s significant patterning of details and the submerged contexts of Francesca’s short lyric “Amor, ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprende” (100–107). It is remarkable that Dante understands unaided that he has come to a place where the carnal sinners are punished. His word is *intesi*—not so much “I learned” as “I understood” (37). He has come to this conclusion himself, with no help from his master, Virgil. This new independence seems to cohere with other details that relate Dante intimately with the *peccator carnali* (38). He recognizes Francesca with the same spontaneity. This spirit tells him no more than that she comes “from that shore where the Po descends to find peace with its followers” (98–99). Then she delivers her short lyric. With no more to go on than this, Dante can call her “Francesca” (116). These simple narrative gestures, the words *intesi* and *Francesca*, identify the sin and one of the sinners of the second circle of Hell, and they seem to identify the poet with the sin of the second circle.

The sin punished here is that of lust, *lussuria*. The sinners driven

about this circle are those "who make their reason subject to their desire" (38–39). In Andrea Orcagna's *Trionfo della Morte* they march under the banner LUSSURIA. Yet in Dante's *Inferno* they seem to conform to a sin more specific than that of lust. Both Virgil and Dante pick out two groups from among the "more than a thousand" spirits that rage by (67–68). Virgil's choice of seven sinners and Dante's choice of two are individual, yet both are informed by the same principle of choice, that of Dante the poet of the *Commedia*. This choice appears to be that of the poet within the *Commedia*, but it is finally the significant choice of the poet of the *Commedia*. The individual choices of Virgil and Dante and their differing *foci* of attention and interest remind us that the experience of the *Inferno* is not that of a single perspective; it is bifocal. Here, in canto 5, it is Virgil who picks out the "ancient" figures, who could have been lost from sight; and it is Dante who, by his presence in Hell, draws attention to his contemporaries, and, ultimately, to himself.

Virgil's list of carnal sinners is a distinctive one. He describes seven figures, four women first, Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra, and Helen, and then three men, Achilles, Paris, and Tristan. One of the remarkable things about this Virgilian catalogue of the *lussuriosi* is that it departs so widely from the catalogue of "those whom unbending love consumed with its cruel wasting" which Virgil gives in *Aeneid* 6.442–451. The two Virgilian catalogues share only one figure in common, Dido:

hic, quos durus amor crudeli tabe peredit,  
 secreti celant calles et myrtea circum  
 silva tegit; curae non ipsa in morte relinquunt.  
 his Phaedram Procrimque locis maestamque Eriphylen,  
 crudelis nati monstrantem vulnera, cernit,  
 Euadnenque et Pasiphaën; his Laodamia  
 it comes et iuvenis quondam, nunc femina, Caeneus  
 rursus et in veterem fato revoluta figuram.  
 inter quas Phoenissa recens a volnere Dido  
 errabat silva in magna. . . .

If Jacques Perret is right about this seemingly random list of women, there is a principle by which they are all brought into a meaningful association. Innocent or guilty, the seven women who are named in the *Aeneid* before Dido are all "as it were, parts of Dido's destiny."<sup>5</sup> The first spirit Virgil points to in the second circle



of Dante's *Inferno* is Semiramis. Virgil's description of this legendary queen seems to come out of the pages of Orosius, where we read: "[Nino] mortuo Samiramis uxor successit. . . . haec, libidine ardens, sanguinem sitiens, inter incessabilia et stupra et homicidia, cum omnes quos regie arcessitos, meretricie habitos concubitu oblectasset, occideret."<sup>6</sup> Semiramis shares something in common with Dido and the others in Virgil's list of seven: with the possible exception of Achilles, her lust was adulterous. As Dido "broke faith with the ashes of Sychaeus" ("ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo," 62, from *Aeneid* 4.552, "non servata fides cineri promissa Sychaeo"), so Semiramis broke faith with the ashes of Ninus. All of the sinners Virgil describes or names did more than simply submit their reason to their passions; the loves of Cleopatra, Helen, Paris, and Tristan were all—and notoriously—adulterous. Only Achilles seems to stand a little apart from this group (5.65–66). He "fought to the end with love." It is perhaps his end, transfixed by the Trojan Deiphobus in an ambush, that explains his presence in this group.<sup>7</sup> But Achilles' end recalls his beginning and his seduction of Deidamia on Scyros—whom he abandoned on Scyros, pregnant with his child, at the urging of Ulysses—a crime that is recalled as one of Ulysses' fraudulent sins in *Inferno* 26.62. If Dante had this sin of the young Achilles in mind, he had the name for it in Statius' *Achilleid*; it is the *commune nefas* of the innocent and abandoned Deidamia and the cunning and lustful Achilles.<sup>8</sup> But Achilles has still another function in canto 5 of the *Inferno*; in the manner of his dying and in the passion that led him to his death, he prepares for the encounter with Paolo and Francesca.

Dante's two carnal sinners were a contemporary legend for their adulterous love, although in her narrative Francesca makes no mention of her husband, Gianciotto. But her seemingly innocent reading of the Old French romance of *Lancelot du Lac* brings still another adulterous relation into Dante's nearly subliminal pattern, that of Lancelot and Guinevere.<sup>9</sup> Dante's contribution to this pattern is not only the contribution of Dante the poet of the *Commedia*; within his poem he falls "as a dead body falls" (5.142), and as he does he seems to include himself, much as he had included himself in the company of the poets of Limbo, in the restless company of the carnal sinners. In the opening of the next canto he speaks of his "pity for the two kinsfolk" ("pietà d'i due cognati," *Inf.* 6.2). In his pity and in his

own broken faith he seems related to the two *cognati*.

### Francesca's Poem

Most of the sinners of the second circle can be described as the "knights and ladies of ancient times" (71), but Paolo and Francesca are Dante's contemporaries and they seem to belong to a world quite different from that of the others contained in the second circle. For them, as for Dante, there is a strange lull in the infernal storm, which is said at first to give the carnal sinners no rest ("che mai non resta," 5.31). Incredibly, this storm seems to fall silent for the encounter between Dante and Francesca ("mentre che 'l vento, come fa, ci tace," 5.96). Dante, Paolo, and Francesca occupy a lull and, it would seem, a privileged position in Hell. Far from blaspheming God (5.36), Francesca speaks of Him as the king of the universe, and she addresses Dante with a courtesy never found again in the *Inferno*. If his meeting with Paolo and Francesca seems to take place in another world it is because it comes from another world—a world that entered the *Commedia* first with Beatrice's courteous address to Virgil in *Inferno* 2.58: "O anima cortese mantovana." This is the world of poetry, courtly devotion, and the *Vita Nuova*.<sup>10</sup>

The hellish winds of Hell do not drive Francesca to Dante. She and Paolo leave Dido's flock, as doves called by desire (5.82–84):

Quali colombe dal disio chiamate  
con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido  
vegnon per l'aere, dal voler portate.

Perhaps the salient detail of this encounter is the elective affinity of Dante for Francesca and of Francesca for Dante (as is evident in her address to him, 88, "O animal grazioso e benigno"). She first tells Dante of the place of her birth and of the love that brought her to her death. Her poem of eight lines is in the *terza rima* of the entire *Commedia*, but her poetry takes us back to Dante's early lyric poetry and the poetry of the Duecento. Francesca's poem, "Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende"—"Love, which is quickly kindled in the noble heart"—has its own integrity in that it can be excerpted from its context in canto 5 of the *Inferno* as I have done (in the Annex to this essay). In no other poem of the *stilnovisti* is the word *Amor* repeated with the deliberate insistence of Francesca's poem.

But the last two lines of her lyric declare it to be a part of Hell

and not of the love poetry of Dante's own age. For her language assimilates love to death:<sup>11</sup>

Amor condusse noi ad una morte.  
Caina attende chi a vita ci spense. (106-107)

In her association of love and the noble heart, *amor* and *il cor gentil*, Francesca has begun a movement in the *Commedia* in which we can follow the gradual assimilation of Dante's earlier lyric poetry into the poem promised at the end of the *Vita Nuova*.<sup>12</sup> In these lines we discover Dante in Dante, and we see more clearly why Dante is so attracted to Paolo and Francesca. The poem from Dante's *Vita Nuova* which connects with this encounter in the *Commedia* is the sonnet "Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa" in chapter 20. The image of the noble heart as kindling at love's flame is not present in the earlier lyric, but the reciprocal attraction of Paolo and Francesca finds its equivalent statement in this same sonnet from the *Vita Nuova*:

Beltate appare in saggia donna pui,  
che piace a li occhi sì, che dentro al core  
nasce un disio de la cosa piacente;  
e tanto dura talora in costui,<sup>13</sup>  
che fa svegliar lo spirito d'Amore.  
E simil face in donna omo valente. (9-14)

The movement from potency to act is present in both Francesca's inconclusive poem and in Dante's earlier metaphysical statement of love's passionate logic. And in Francesca's striking and courtly "Amor, ch' a nullo amato amar perdona" there is an echo of this doctrine and of Dante's courtly manner of expressing the relation between love and the noble heart:

Falli natura quand'è amorosa,  
Amor per sire e 'l cor per sua magione. (5-6)

For Francesca, Love is her seigneur, but ultimately not her Lord. Dante's "Amore e 'l cor gentil" is one of the submerged contexts of canto 5 of the *Inferno*. But, since this sonnet itself responds to still another text, there is still another poem that needs to be drawn to the surface before the depths of this canto can be appreciated. Beneath Francesca's language to Dante is the language of Dante's *Vita Nuova* and beneath the language of the *Vita Nuova* is the lyric of a poet Dante will encounter on the terrace of the lustful on the Mount of

## Purgatory.

This is Guido Guinizzelli, whose poetic manifesto "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore" (reproduced in the Annex to this essay) informs both Francesca's poem and some of the details of its context in the *Inferno*. Dante's reflections on love in chapter 20 of the *Vita Nuova* are in direct response to Guinizzelli. Dante opens his poem with an affirmation of the truth of his predecessor's poetry—"as the philosopher posits in his poem" ("sì come il saggio in suo dittare pone," 2). The element of wisdom is completely absent from Francesca's poem. In Guinizzelli we find a conception of love that radiates through both the *Vita Nuova* and Francesca's poem in the *Commedia*. This is his concrete image of the abstract relation between potency and act: "the fire of love is kindled in the noble heart / as potency in a precious stone" ("foco d'amore in gentil cor s'apprende / come vertute in pietra preziosa," 11-12). And here, in Guinizzelli's poem, we discover too the origin of the simile by which Paolo and Francesca are introduced into the *Commedia*—"as doves called by desire":

Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore  
come l'ausello in selva a la verdura. (1-2)

This conception of a natural place of rest enters the world of the *Commedia*, as we have seen in the simile which compares the manner in which the two storm-tossed spirits respond to Dante's call "as doves called by desire . . . come to their sweet nest" (5.82-83). The nest, with its promise of home and rest, is the expression of the conception compressed in Guinizzelli's choice of the verb *rempaira*—"repair", or in the original sense of the word *repatriare*—to return home, to one's own country. Such a promise is illusory in Hell. It is only a part of the lull Dante has created in the second circle of his *Inferno*, a lull in which Francesca can speak of the Po as descending to have peace with the streams that follow his course (5.98-99). It is this lull that brings Dante, the poet of the *Commedia* into his poem. Yet in describing this Dante with accuracy it is difficult to choose between Dante the "poet" and Dante the "pilgrim." In truth, this Dante, who enters the *Commedia* in canto 5 of the *Inferno* is neither; rather he is a confessional figure, caught between his past and present, and still attracted by his past and the amatory world of Francesca's poetry. Francesca's poetry takes us back—"of necessity"—to the poetry and

experience of the author of the *Vita Nuova* and, indeed, beyond that to the poetry of Guinizzelli. But the two poems of its submerged context, Dante's and Guinizzelli's, make for an essential contrast. Both insist on wisdom and Guinizzelli's poem points to the heavens in a way Francesca's does not. We come to realize that the lull in the "eternal storm" of the second circle was just that—a lull. But we come to realize too that the poet of the *Commedia* has created this lull for the poet in the *Commedia* and that by this gesture he is creating a confessional figure that speaks by signs and gestures, as Dante the Pilgrim will when he has reached Beatrice and his day of judgement in *Purgatorio* 31.14–15. The signs and gestures are those of the poet of the *Commedia* as well.

Dante's call to Paolo and Francesca reminds us of still another call, and it returns us to the first of the bird similes of the *Commedia*. Dante has left it for his reader to turn back to the language describing the souls of the damned as they take wing over the dark waters of Acheron (3.116–117):

gittansi di quel lito ad una ad una,  
per cenni come augel per suo richiamo.

It also prepares for the moment at the base of the Mount Purgatory when the stern figure of Cato scatters the spirits who had gathered to listen to Casella sing Dante's "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" (*Purg.* 2.112). They scatter like doves—"come . . . li colombi" (2.124–133). These doves reassert the connection between amorous instinct and poetry that we find in the second circle. In Purgatory, these doves are scattered by a new care, and this care can be expressed by still another bird simile. It is the language Virgil chooses when he speaks to Dante of the lure (*richiamo*) by which God attracts mankind to him: "The heavens call to you and circle around you, displaying to you their eternal splendors, and your eyes gaze only on the earth: wherefore He smites you who sees all" (*Purg.* 14.148–151). The last lines of Francesca's poem reveal no consciousness of sin nor any sense of how close the words *Amor* and *morte* are in Italian (106–107). In this canto Francesca nowhere confesses her sin; she only speaks of fratricide and the punishment that awaits her lover's murderer. But throughout this canto Dante seems to have begun to utter the faint words of a personal confession. His sin is not lust simple; it is adultery.

## Other Women

When Francesca has told Dante the very partial story of her love and death, he falls, "as a dead body falls" ("e caddi, come corpo morto cade," 5.142). This fall is part of a cadence that is initiated with Dante's loss of consciousness at the threshold to Hell (3.136), and continues as he stands before Satan in a state of suspended animation (*Inf.* 34.22–25); we are reminded of it in the *Purgatorio* by the earthquake that announces Statius' release from the terrace of *Avaritia* and Dante's sense that the Mount of Purgatory itself was falling (*Purg.* 31.89), and the cadence closes as Dante collapses before Beatrice: "caddi vinto" (*Purg.* 31.89). His collapse, first at the inner threshold of the second circle of Hell, and then on the Mount of Purgatory, defines the progress of the major statement of the most important of the confessional themes of the *Commedia*—that of Dante's broken faith.

So far, we have discovered and related a number of the pieces that seem to constitute, in Goethe's phrase, "the fragments of a great confession."<sup>14</sup> There is that strange lull in the hellish storm of the second circle, which seems to exempt Dante and Francesca from the laws of Hell. Then there is Virgil's distinctive list of seven carnal sinners. This list is distinctive for its tacit definition of the sin of the second circle as love adulterous rather than lust simple. Although she figures second in this list, Dido defines its character; she broke faith with the ashes of her dead husband (5.62). And we discover her in the second circle and not in the wood of the suicides. It is meaningful too that in Bernard Silvestris' commentary to Book 4 of the *Aeneid* the relation between Dido and Aeneas can be described as follows: "Aeneas goes hunting. Driven by storms into a cave, he dallies with Dido and there commits adultery."<sup>15</sup> Then, there is Dante's encounter with Francesca that brings two more adulterous relations into a circle that focuses on a relation that seems to have concerned Dante more than the sin of lust. Paolo and Francesca come to him "from the flock of Dido" (5.84), and Francesca's poem introduces the very personal world of the *Vita Nuova* into the *Commedia*. And, finally, there is Dante's fall, a gesture that recurs as he encounters Beatrice on top of the Mount of Purgatory.

Here, in canto 31 of the *Purgatorio*, a recognition of consciousness of a waywardness (*riconoscenza*, 88) overwhelms the pilgrim on the

mountain. And it is at this point that Beatrice demands a confession of him as he stands on the other side of the river of Lethe—*tua confession* (6). Significantly, Dante, in his shame and confusion, cannot give voice to his confession. His lips form the acknowledgement that the eyes—and the eyes of his reader—are needed to see. It is only from this vantage and this moment of articulate silence that we realize what has given the carnal sinners of the second circle of the *Inferno* their distinctive physiognomy; and why it is that Paolo and Francesca come to Dante from “the flock where Dido is” (*Inf.* 5.85). All the spirits of this circle have been adulterers. All have, literally, given themselves “to another.” Now it appears that Dante too has broken faith and given himself to another or to others. Were he to be damned for this sin, he too would belong to “the flock where Dido is.” His sin of adultery explains why it is he should recall Dido’s words of confession to her sister Anna as he confronts an indignant Beatrice. In the *Aeneid*, Dido recognized her old love for Sychaeus in her new passion for Aeneas (4.20–23):

Anna, fatebor enim, miseri post fata Sychaei  
coniugis et sparsos fraterna caede Penates  
solus hic inflexit sensus animumque labantem  
impulit. agnosco veteris vestigia flammae.

And, as he returns to her on the Mount of Purgatory, Dante recognizes that warmth of his ancient love for Beatrice—“*conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma*” (30.48).

That this flame had grown dim in him is painfully clear from Beatrice’s description of the life he has led since her death (*Purg.* 30.121–126):

Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:  
mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui,  
meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto.  
Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui  
di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,  
questi sì tolse a me, e diessi altrui.

When Beatrice says that “this one took himself from me and gave himself to others” (30.126), she is not describing the kind of adultery we are most familiar with. She was married at the time of her death, and not long after Dante was to marry Gemma Donati. Dante’s was a Pauline adultery of the heart and the imagination, but for Dante

it was the most serious kind of adultery or "alienation." Beatrice's accusation that Dante gave himself to others can be interpreted allegorically, and, indeed, when Dante comes to confess that he had become estranged from Beatrice for a period of ten years, he speaks vaguely of the distraction of "present things" ("le presenti cose," *Purg.* 31.34).<sup>16</sup> But Beatrice, who does not share Dante's oppressive feeling of guilt, speaks of the "advantages displayed on the brows of others" (31.29). And she says plainly that a young woman or "other novelty" should not have kept him weighted to the earth (31.59).

In the *Vita Nuova* itself, Dante is not silent about the attractions of other women. Four sections of this book of memory record a struggle between his heart and his reason as he found himself drawn to another woman after Beatrice's death. There is also the evidence of his *Rime Petrose*, the revealing dream of the Siren in *Purgatorio* 19.17–33, and the brutal word uttered by Bonagiunta in *Purgatorio* 24.37, "Gentucca," to suggest that when Beatrice speaks of Dante's giving himself *altrui*, she has more than one person in mind. One of Dante's biographers speaks kindly of Dante's "alleged amours."<sup>17</sup> But the important thing to remember is that Dante, and by Dante I mean Dante the poet, was his own accuser, that his sin was adultery, not real but imagined, and that this "adultery" explains the principle that has brought together the sinners punished in the second circle of the *Inferno*. What is finally important to Dante's confessional mode of writing is not the truth of his confession (its *Wahrheit*), but the art of his poetry (his *Dichtung*). It is an art, to take a phrase from Dante himself, that reveals itself in Hell—and in Purgatory; and it even reveals itself in Heaven. It is an art that Dante seems to describe himself (in *Inf.* 19.10–12):

O somma sapienza, quanta è l'arte  
che mostri in cielo, in terra e nel mal mondo,  
e quanto giusto tua virtù comparte!

### Epilogue in Heaven

There is one massive obstacle to this interpretation of the nearly inaudible confession of *Inferno* 5. This is Dante's explicit statement to Beatrice in the *Purgatorio* that he has no memory of ever having become estranged from his first love (33.91–93):

Ond'io rispuosi lei: "Non mi ricorda



ch'i'straniasse me già mai da voi,  
né honne coscienza che rimorda."

Futhermore, the astral nymphs of the Terrestrial Paradise had called Dante "your faithful one" (*Purg.* 31.134), it would seem with justice. Even the Virgin Mary had called Dante "il tuo fedele" as she addressed Lucia in *Inferno* 2.98. But Dante's statement to Beatrice that his conscience is clear comes after he has drunk from the river Lethe and crossed over Eunoe, and Beatrice's response to Dante seems the appropriate response to a sinner like Dante (*Purg.* 33.94-99):

"E se tu ricordar non te ne puoi"  
sorridente rispuose, "or ti rammenta  
come bevesti di Letè ancoi;  
e se dal fummo foco s'argomenta  
cotesta oblivion chiaro conchiude  
colpa ne la tua voglia altrove attenta."

It is very much in keeping with the character of this poem that we should see the smoke in Hell and the clear flame at the top of the Mount of Purgatory.

Dante's confession is not complete with his profession of forgetfulness at the end of the *Purgatorio*. For Beatrice's smiling response points to a moment in the *Paradiso* when the sin of the second circle is recalled even as it is forgotten and forgiven, with a smile. Dante's confession concludes only with canto 9 of the *Paradiso*, and exactly where one would expect to find such a confession of weakness—in the sphere of Venus.<sup>18</sup> Here the themes which have been strictly associated with Dante's confession are reasserted for the last time in the poem. Poetry and its inspiration in the experience of love have been a part of Dante's confession; Francesca's "Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende," is a reference to Dante's own "Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa," and Dante, in citing Dante, is bringing himself into the world of the second circle. We discover poetry again on the last of the terraces of the Mount of Purgatory, where the ardor of Guido Guinizzelli and Arnault Daniel is refined in penitential fire. Here, as in canto 2 of the *Purgatorio*, we are reminded of Dante's own early poetry (*Purg.* 26.106-108). And the cranes of the second circle have migrated to the terrace of *Luxuria* (*Purg.* 26.43-46).

In the *Paradiso* we discover poetry once again in the sphere of Venus, as Charles Martel pronounces the first lines of Dante's "Voi

che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete" (*Par.* 8.37). In canto 9, the poet, Folco of Marseilles, recalls our suppressed theme even as he speaks of the forgetfulness of sin in heaven. And finally Dido returns to the poem for a last appearance in the sphere of Venus. She is recalled, seemingly by accident, as Dante reflects on the error of pagan and poetic conceptions of the goddess Venus (7.1–9). And she is recalled for the last time as Folco confesses the stamp of Venus on his own character (9.97–99):

ché più non arse la figlia di Belo,  
noiando e a Sicheo e a Creusa,  
di me, infin che si convenne al pelo.

In heaven, Folco's amorousness is not a matter for remorse, and his smile is meant to remind us of the smile of Beatrice in the *Purgatorio* (*Par.* 9.103–105; cf. *Purg.* 33.95):

Non però qui si pente, ma si ride,  
non de la colpa, ch'a mente non torna,  
ma del valor ch'ordinò e provide.

The great power that ordained and provided for the theme which we have followed from the second circle of Hell to the last terrace of the Mount of Purgatory and the meeting with Beatrice and from there to the sphere of Venus is Dante's, and the last word of canto 9 of the *Paradiso* seals Dante's long confession of his broken faith. Adultery—*avoltero*—is a word pronounced only once in the *Divine Comedy*, and it is pronounced here.

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### Annex: Three Poems

#### 1. Francesca's Poem (*Inferno* 5.100–107):

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,  
prese costui de la bella persona  
che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.  
Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,  
me prese del costui piacer sì forte,  
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.

Amor condusse noi ad una morte.  
Caina attende che a vita ci spense . . .

2. From *Vita Nuova* 20 (no. 34 in Foster and Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*):

Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa,  
sì come il saggio in suo dittare pone,  
e così esser l'un sanza l'altro osa  
com'alma razional sanza ragione.  
Falli natura quand'è amorosa,  
Amor per sire e 'l cor per la sua magione,  
dentro la qual dormendo si riposa  
tal volta poca e tal lunga stagione.  
Beltate appare in saggia donna pui,  
che piace a li occhi sì, che dentro al core  
nasce un disio de la cosa piacente;  
e tanto dura talora in costui,  
che fa svegliar lo spirito d'Amore.  
E simil face in donna omo valente.

3. Guido Guinizzelli's poem in Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* 2: 460–461 (vv. 1–20):

Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore  
come l'ausello in selva a la verdura;  
né fe' amor anti che gentil core,  
né gentil cor anti ch'amor, natura:  
ch'adesso con' fu 'l sole,  
sì tosto lo splendore lucente,  
né fu davanti 'l sole;  
e prende amore in gentilezza loco  
così propriamente  
come calore in clarità di foco.  
  
Foco d'amore in gentil cor s'apprende  
come vertute in petra preziosa  
che de la stella valor no i discende  
anti che 'l sol la faccia gentil cosa;  
poi che n'ha tratto fòre  
per sua forza lo sol ciò che li è vile,  
stella li dà valore:  
così lo cor ch'e fatto da natura  
asletto, pur, gentile,  
donna a guisa di stella lo 'nnamora.

## NOTES

\* I would like to thank William Arrowsmith for his helping me see the forest of Dante's dark wood through its trees and Amilcare Iannucci who provided much needed guidance through the thickets of Dante criticism; and also the Classics Department of Vassar College who provided the occasion for my Blegen lectures on Dante.

- 1 The distinction between poet and pilgrim is equally familiar to the reader of Chaucer, who must distinguish between Geoffrey Chaucer, the poet of the *Canterbury Tales* and "Geoffrey" of the "I" of the pilgrim and narrator in the *Canterbury Tales*. George Lyman Kittredge 45–48 approached this distinction in addressing the problem of the poet of and dreamer in the *The Book of the Duchess* when he stated "the dreamer is as much a part of the fiction of the *Book of the Duchess* as the Merchant or the Pardoner or the Host is a part of the fiction in the *Canterbury Tales*." But one can take a step further and describe the "I" of the *Canterbury Tales* as itself a persona, as do Robert C. Elliott 4 and many of Chaucer's critics since Kittredge. In following the confessional theme of Dante's "broken faith" in the *Commedia* I am in tacit disagreement with Spitzer and Contini.
- 2 The presentation copy of the *Paradiso* begins by declaring the identity of its author, Dante Alighieri. "Libri titulus est: 'Incipit Comedia Dantis Alagherii, florentini natione, non moribus'" (*Epistle* 13.10). Yet Dante does have something to say about his character as he insists on the reality of the experience he is recording by asserting that he has forgotten it. And if his reader carps at Dante's deserving such an experience, let him read the *Book of Daniel*: "Si vero in dispositionem elevationis tante propter peccatum loquentis oblatrarant, legant Danielelem" [2. 3–5] (*Epistle* 13.28). Dante here acknowledges the sinfulness of the poet of the *Commedia*.
- 3 Singleton, *Purgatorio: Commentary* 743.
- 4 The *selva oscura* of the beginning of the poem points in many directions, but clearly one of these is to the great and infernal wood in which Aeneas encounters Dido after he had abandoned her in Carthage ("errabat silva in magna," *Aeneid* 6.451). Aeneas' dim recognition of her ("agnovitque per umbras / obscuram," 452–453) also struck Dante and it is recalled in *Inferno* 15.17–19.
- 5 "Les compagnes de Didon" 251.
- 6 *Adversum paganos* 1.4.4.7–8, as quoted in Singleton, *Inferno: Commentary*, 78.
- 7 In Dictys' *Ephemeris* 4.2, we have the medieval account of Achilles' end in his fatal attraction for Polyxena which led into the ambush where he was twice transfixed by Deiphobus' sword.
- 8 Cf. Statius, *Achilleid* 1.669 and 536–674 for the version of the seduction and abandonment that was authoritative for Dante. Deidamia is recalled in *Purgatorio* 9.34–39 (an allusion to the beginning of the story of Achilles on

- Scyros), and later in *Purgatorio* 22.114 (where we discover that she is in Limbo).
- 9 Avallé's study of ". . . De Fole Amor" helps put the two "modern" characters of the list of the *peccator carnali* of *Inferno* 5 into their proper perspective. That is, Lancelot and Tristan participate in what he argues is the pattern for "les contes d'adultère". (Lancelot is added to this list by Francesca in *Inferno* 5.128.) But it is Boccaccio (in his comments on *Inferno* 5) and not the narrative of Dante that conforms to Avallé's pattern. So far as Dante is involved in the sin of the second circle, I will argue that he himself is the informer (*lauzengier*) against his own adultery.
  - 10 The relation—or affinity—between Beatrice's language to Virgil in *Inferno* 2 and the language of Francesca in *Inferno* 5 is well characterized by Teodolinda Barolini 7–12. But the contrasts are as significant: "*Inferno* V represents one possible outcome for the love lyric; *Inferno* II points ahead to the other" (12).
  - 11 For the assimilation of the words *amore* and *morte* in their medieval context, cf. Avallé 118.
  - 12 Francesca's poem does not figure in the list of *autocitazioni* offered by Contini, *Un'idea* 38 n. 1 (who cites, inevitably, *Purgatorio* 2.112, 26.51, and *Paradiso* 8.37—poems that surely fit into a pattern as they are reassembled in the *Commedia*). His study of Dante not as the familiar pilgrim but as a *poet* within his *Commedia* is crucial to my argument, except that he excludes from consideration the *Paradiso*, as I would not. Barolini 31–84 retraces his steps, with fewer detours and with greater direction, and in conclusion formulates a challenging statement of how Dante's autobiography is subservient to the teleological plan of his *Commedia* (84). But of his confessional mode, there is not a word said.
  - 13 Francesca's reference to Paolo as *costui* is an indication of his physical and moral nearness to her, as Poggioli saw 331; but it also echoes the language of the *Vita Nuova*, precisely in verse 12 of this poem.
  - 14 *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in *Goethes Werke in zwei Bände*. Vol. 1. Munich 1957. 1040.
  - 15 In the translation of Schreiber and Maresca 24.
  - 16 As does Michele Barbi 97 among others of Dante's apologists, of whom Dante was the first but least sincere.
  - 17 Toynbee 71, like many of Dante's apologists before Beatrice and like many of his translators, would like to take the *altrui* of *Purgatorio* 31.126 as referring to a single person. Paolini 207–224 cannot imagine the possibility of a Pauline adultery of the heart, and wavers between the personal and allegorical interpretation of this episode. Whatever the interpretation taken, it must consider this "confessional" passage in terms of the architectonic context provided by Singleton in his "The Pattern at the Center." Beatrice has appeared in judgement, like Christ at his second coming.
  - 18 One would expect to find it here, since the correspondences of the circle of the *lussuriosi* in the *Inferno*, the terrace of *Luxuria* in the *Purgatorio*,

and the sphere of Venus in the *Paradiso* are the most convincing vindication of Amilcare Iannucci's critical principle of letting Dante serve as his own commentator in the *Commedia* and allowing him to direct our reading through the parallel episodes of the *Commedia* (especially 316).

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## From *locus amoris* to Infernal Pentecost: the Sin of Brunetto Latini

The fame of Brunetto Latini was until recently tied to his role in *Inferno* 15 rather than to the intrinsic literary or philosophical merit of his own works.<sup>1</sup> Leaving aside, for the moment, the complex question of Latini's influence on the author of the *Commedia*, the encounter, and particularly the words "ché 'n la mente m' è fitta, e or m'accora, / la cara e buona imagine paterna / di voi quando nel mondo ad ora ad ora / m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna" (82-85) do seem to acknowledge a profound debt by the pilgrim towards the old notary. Only one other figure in the *Inferno* is addressed with a similar expression of gratitude, and that is, of course, Virgil:

Tu se' lo mio maestro e'l mio autore;  
tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi  
lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore.

(*Inf.* 1.85-87)

If Virgil is antonomastically *the* teacher, what facet of Dante's creative personality was affected by Latini? The encounter between the notary and the pilgrim in *Inferno* 15 is made all the more intriguing by the use of the same phrase "lo mio maestro" (97) to refer to Virgil, silent throughout the episode except for his single utterance "Bene ascolta chi la nota" (99). That it is the poet and not the pilgrim who thus refers to Virgil at this point, when the two magisterial figures, one leading forward to Beatrice and the other backward to the city of strife, conflict and exile, provides a clear hint of tension between "present" and "past" teachers.

The words "m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna" indicate a continuous *magisterium* on the part of the old teacher, Brunetto, whose specific nature, however, does not seem to be conclusively connected to any particular aspect of Dante's literary or intellectual activity.<sup>2</sup> The period in question was probably 1285 (Dante's twentieth year) to 1294 (the year of Brunetto's death). This coincided with Dante's

own emergence in the literary and eventually the political life of the city. The notary's literary activity had taken place during his exile in France (1260–1266), and in the last years of his life he had become an eminent intellectual-political-civic personality.<sup>3</sup> This eminence in the Florence of his time was perhaps best illustrated by Giovanni Villani who, after quoting the titles of his major works (*Rettorica*, *Tesoro* and *Tesoretto*), wrote that he had been “cominciatore e maestro in digrossare i Fiorentini, e farli scorti in bene parlare, e in sapere guidare e reggere la nostra repubblica secondo la politica” (*Cronica* 3:22). This striking statement is echoed in Dante's words “m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna.” Both Villani and Dante attribute to Latini a didactic function. For Villani, Brunetto's teaching raised the general level of Florentine culture, and seems to have had a particular impact on political thought. It must be emphasized that the intense outburst by the notary in *Inferno* 15 is centered on questions of a political nature, although in a context which is clearly more personal and subjective than Villani's. The choice of Latini as the central figure in the canto, the spokesman of a past formerly shared by Dante, and his magisterial posture, therefore, seem to match his role as guide and educator for a whole generation of Florentines.<sup>4</sup> This explains in part the traditionally accepted, but ultimately misleading interpretation of the encounter as a moving interlude, a nostalgic “return” to the past, and as a scene of deep pathos and reverence.<sup>5</sup>

There is, however, ample evidence in the canto that justifies a different approach which, while it does not reject the literal meaning, including the notion of Latini's sin as sodomy, also exposes a more complex poetic strategy of much deeper moral and spiritual significance. Special mention must be made here to a remarkable book by André Pézard who produced a truly impressive array of evidence to support his theory that Latini's sin is “spiritual sodomy,” Dante's way of eternally damning his old teacher for contravening the law of nature in writing the *Tresor* in French. *Dante sous la pluie de feu*, notwithstanding its great philological ingenuity and its erudition, has received only marginal acceptance. To it, however, we owe a debt of gratitude for opening the door to the need of examining alternative possibilities of interpretation in *Inferno* 15.<sup>6</sup>

The assumption by Latini of a paternal authority is clearly equated to his didactic and guiding role in the life of the young Dante:



ché 'n la mente m'è fitta, e or m'accora,  
 la cara e buona imagine paterna  
 di voi quando nel mondo ad ora ad ora  
 m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna.

(82-85)

If Brunetto's paternal guiding and didactic role had been his in the past, it becomes patently incongruous in view of the presence of Virgil at the side of the pilgrim. It is made even more ironic when seen from the perspective of the sin for which he is punished. The very first words spoken by Latini after the initial mutual surprise (which in itself should serve as a clue on how to approach the episode), are two short sentences, each of which is prefaced by a *captatio benevolentiae*: "O figliuol mio, non ti dispiaccia / se Brunetto Latino un poco teco / ritorna 'n dietro e lascia andar la traccia" (31-33), and "O figliuol. . ." (37). The prayer to turn back couched in this way is the first step in the seduction of the young poet by the authoritative figure of the old civic sage. A further clue in the subtle process by which the poet exposes the true image of the old teacher is found in Brunetto's enquiry about his pupil's voyage, and in the answer given by the pilgrim:

El cominciò: "Qual fortuna o destino  
 anzi l'ultimo dì qua giù ti mena?  
 e chi è questi che mostra 'l cammino?"  
 "Là sù di sopra, in la vita serena,"  
 rispuos'io lui, "mi smarri' in una valle,  
 avanti che l'età mia fosse piena.  
 Pur ier mattina le volsi le spalle:  
 questi m'apparve, tornand'io in quella,  
 e reducemmi a ca per questo calle."

(46-54)

In thus synthetically informing his teacher of the high points and goal of his mission, the pilgrim is being both exhaustive and evasive. The answer complies with the notary's question by summing up the beginning of the journey, the circumstances of the *smarrimento*, the role of Virgil, but in doing so it evades the central issue of the real significance of the mission. In the reference to Virgil as "questi," which echoes the "costui" of verse 36, the role of the "new" teacher is bound to remain hidden to Brunetto. In this sense it has the same function as the "colui" in Dante's answer to Cavalcante in *Inferno*

10.62, which gives rise to the famous equivocation on the part of Guido's father. Indeed, Brunetto remains in the dark, as befits all the souls of the damned, but sodomites in particular, blind to the salvational dimension in Dante's journey (Mazzotta 138-39).

This inability by Brunetto to seize the implications of Dante's mission is made even more obvious in the notary's next words:

Ed elli a me: "Se tu segui tua stella,  
non puoi fallire a glorioso porto,  
se ben m'accorsi ne la vita bella;  
e s'io non fossi sì per tempo morto,  
veggendo il cielo a te così benigno  
dato t'avrei a l'opera conforto."

(55-60)

The astrological allusion, the prediction of literary glory awaiting Dante, seemingly extend Brunetto's claim to paternal, guiding authority beyond death itself, were it not for the ambiguous nature of these words in which the use of three hypothetical clauses clearly undercuts the old notary's tutorship in a task whose goal he believes he knows.

The reason for this ironic equivocation is to be found in the pilgrim's recapitulation of the journey from the *smarrimento* in the "selva oscura" to this point in time. But while Dante's words express a forward-driving impetus and point to Virgil as a guide to a "home" beyond, Latini is drawn backward to a consideration of a goal which has finite, worldly connotations. The nostalgic reference to the "vita bella," the regret for an "untimely" death, the prediction of glory for the talented pupil, all betray the essence of Latini's false vision. What triggers Brunetto's regression is the echo in the pilgrim's words of a similar experience by the notary as described in the *Tesoretto*.<sup>7</sup> This literary "palimpsest" (Della Terza 23) allows the notary to assume his magisterial position and thus to replace Virgil at the side of the pilgrim. Besides this ambiguous super-imposition of the *Tesoretto* on the *Commedia*, and vice-versa, other parallel lexical and stylistical elements emerge, revealing a more complex relationship between teacher and pupil than appears on the surface. The expression "a capo chino" (44), for example, which seemingly manifests the pilgrim's reverence for the notary, has quite a different function in the *Tesoretto*. There, in the passage quoted in the notes

(197), the expression is used as a **p**relude to the *smarrimento*, and is suggestive of the despair and anguish at the news of defeat and of exile. It is an image to which the Goddess Natura, Brunetto's guide at this point in the allegory of the *Tesoretto*, will return:

Vedi ch'ogni animale  
 per forza naturale  
 la testa e 'l viso bassa  
 verso la terra bassa  
 per far significanza  
 de la grande bassanza  
 di lor condizione,  
 che son senza ragione  
 e seguon lor volere  
 senza misura avere:  
 ma l'omo ha d'alta guisa  
 sua natura divisa  
 per vantaggio d'onore,  
 che 'n alto a tutte l'ore  
 mira per dimostrare  
 lo suo nobile affare,  
 ched ha per conoscenza  
 e ragione e scienza.

(679–696)

The expression “eyes fixed upon the ground” is a topos which Brunetto derived from Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*,<sup>8</sup> where it is also used as a metaphor for “exile” from virtue and knowledge, and the abandonment, therefore, of man’s essential humanity which partakes of the divine. To walk with eyes downcast, in other words, signifies a fall, a surrender to the lower faculties which man shares with animals (an idea emphasized by the repetition of “bassa” and the *annominatio* “bassa-bassanza”). The words “ma ’l capo chino / tenea com’uom che reverente vada” cannot consequently be taken at face value, given the implications of these obvious intertextual references. The simile in this context suggests reverence only on the literal level: metaphorically it becomes an instrument with which the poet uses the notary’s own words against him to expose his sinfulness. In this interplay of illusory impressions in which key words and images from the *Tesoretto* work their way into the poetic fibre of the *Commedia*, we have an apparent assimilation of the old notary’s values by the younger poet. Indeed Dante has given his old teacher as much free

play to expand on his doctrine as demanded by the principles they formerly shared. It becomes apparent, however, that Latini's vision, as inevitably required by the exigencies of the pilgrim's mission, and by the presence of the other "maestro," Virgil, against which it must measure itself, has to be judged woefully inadequate. In the context of that mission the specific historicity of the notary is an obligatory passage, but one which must be transcended. Brunetto's "cara e buona imagine paterna" is a reflection *in malo* of the "maestro cortese," and "dolcissimo padre" who leads to Beatrice. The past is therefore recuperated only *here*, at this point in the journey, so that it can be exorcized and dismissed forever.

At the conclusion of Brunetto's harangue against the Florentines, Dante, dismayed by the prophecy of the exile, declares that he will write his teacher's words in the book of his memory, to have them glossed by Beatrice:

Ciò che narrate di mio corso scrivo,  
e serbolo a chiosar con altro testo  
a donna che saprà, s'a lei arrivo.

(88-90)

The reference to Beatrice, evasive though it may be, presents the reader with an additional irony, and perhaps the most significant clue on how the episode is to be read. Certainly the use of the term "donna" here is comparable in its vagueness to the "questi" twice used to refer to Virgil in the canto, once by Brunetto (48) and once by the pilgrim (53). That Brunetto is not aroused to enquire further about this woman is perhaps understandable in view of the sin for which he is punished. What counts even more in a poetic and philosophical sense, however, is that he will continue to be in the dark about the real meaning of the journey.

Brunetto's inability to be alerted to the significance of the pilgrim's reference to Virgil and Beatrice as key figures in *his* journey is caused, as we have seen, by the assumption of the notary's paternal-didactic authority over Dante. The echoes to the *Tesoretto*, which trigger the equivocation, should now be probed further in an effort to extract any additional relevance which these interconnections might yield.

The *Tesoretto's* genesis is the battle of Montaperti, vividly recalled by Farinata ("Lo strazio e 'l grande scempio / che fece l'Arbia col-

orata in rosso," *Inf.* 10.85–6). The autobiographical section, following the dedication to a "valente signore," is a very brief account of the circumstances which led to the exile (113–190), and is notable for the intensity of the political feelings expressed, a characteristic which is felt even more strongly in *Inferno* 15. The rest of the *Tesoretto*, which runs for a total of 2,994 lines, centres on the encounter with three allegorical figures: Natura, Vertute and Amore. The main thrust of the notary's allegory is based on Natura's teachings, and becomes a quest for harmony. Instinctively, it seems, Brunetto, exiled from his city, torn by strife, turns to a vision of a perfectly structured order in which each man—"ogn'om"—though uprooted from his past, seeks a definite place and function, first in the family and then in the commune, seen as values that emanate from cosmic and universal principles. The genesis of the *Tesoretto*, therefore, is founded on a fundamental concern with the *polis* which, in a more explicit way, would become Brunetto's central preoccupation in the *Tresor* and *Rettorica*.<sup>9</sup>

At the centre of the *Tesoretto*'s *narratio fabulosa* stands the individual from whom the life-sustaining ties with the commune have been severed. The poet's implicit theme is the search for a renewal which heals political and social wounds and leads directly from total alienation to complete integration in the historical reality of the city. In this process, the science of politics teaches man to govern, to paraphrase Brunetto, in war and peace, over one's own citizens and others according to "reason and justice." The *polis* for him, therefore, acquires a loftiness and a nobility which distinguish it from the ambiguous sinfulness attributed by the Augustinian tradition to the city of man.<sup>10</sup>

In the Amore episode, which occupies verses 2181–2426, the protagonist in this imaginative *renovatio* is waylaid by the blind god of love who, with the help of Paura, Disianza, Amore and Speranza, sows discord, grief and destruction all around. The section is clearly intended as an attack on the doctrine of courtly love.<sup>11</sup> But Latini's condemnation has a dialectical relationship with the important stages in the wayfarer's progress in the context of the natural and harmonious equilibrium of cosmic and moral forces presided over by Natura in the first part of the poem. Love is a disturbing element capable of upsetting that equilibrium, and the havoc wreaked by the

four "donne valenti," who serve the blind Cupid, is seen as the destructive coming asunder of the four elements, threatening to reduce men to the state of wild beasts. Love, therefore, is an emotion which, in its thrust to find pleasure, directs the individual to seek corporeal things. As such it is the vice of concupiscence which, as already seen in the topos "eyes fixed upon the ground," is one of the causes for the pilgrim's (and everyman's) fall. From the perspective of the cosmos, created according to eternal and immutable laws, love represents a blind force, a revolt against Reason.<sup>12</sup> Mutability and chaos, are the key motifs of the love episode, evident in the characteristics of the *locus amoris* itself, and in the erratic behaviour of the people who inhabit it.<sup>13</sup> The wayfarer becomes so hopelessly entangled in the snares of love that his efforts to escape prove useless, until Ovid intervenes to rescue him.<sup>14</sup>

The appearance of Ovid at this point in the *Tesoretto*, as a premise to the *Penetenza* which occurs immediately after the "fall" represented by the encounter with love, would require a longer explanation than is possible here. Suffice it to say, for our purposes, that Ovid ("Ovidio maggiore") is here recalled not only as the author of the *Ars amandi* and the *Remedia amoris*, as Contini suggests, but also as the poet of the *Metamorphoses*. His role is indeed to extricate the wayfarer from the hopeless tangle represented by the encounter with love (a "metamorphosis *in malo*"), but he is also the guide to the spiritual "metamorphosis *in bono*" which is to take place in the *Penetenza*. The need to "change" and to "convert" is stressed, as a counter-effect to the fall. The Ovid of the *Metamorphoses*, whose "moralization" was a common feature of twelfth and thirteenth century literature, appears here as a key element in the conversion of the wayfarer. Manifesting itself primarily as an allegorization of the *Metamorphoses*, the "Christianization of Ovid" attempted to salvage a text whose alleged immorality had been a traditional obstacle in the Middle Ages. The opening cosmogony of the poem had, however, intrigued its readers who noticed striking similarities with the *Genesis* account of creation. According to the allegorical interpretation which soon became popular, Ovid's version of the creation of the world from eternally pre-existent chaos, and the stories of men transformed into beasts were a means of relating the cosmic forces of nature, and the changes which took place around us, to the mutabil-

ity, for good or evil, taking place within each man.<sup>15</sup> In essence the part Ovid plays in the *Tesoretto* in rescuing the helpless protagonist is much the same. The resultant emergence of the wayfarer from the chaos and confusion into which he has fallen can find its analogy in the creation of the universe; the liberation of forms from the *silva* of *hyle* which occurs in the description of creation by Natura (321–364; cf. Wetherbee 11–13). The reform of the wayfarer, then, does not take place in isolation from either the general account of creation as set out by Natura, or the moral and ethical exposition which occupies the central portion of the poem. The reference to Ovid serves to illustrate Latini's concern to connect the adventures of the protagonist to basic questions of rationality and ethics whose ultimate value is verifiable in the cosmos.

Latini's overwhelming preoccupation, as it emerges in his works, was with the welfare of his city. The *Tesoretto*, far from being "meschino, timido, puerile" (Benedetto 175), merits far more serious study and attention than it has been granted so far. In its imaginative allegorical structure are found the main themes of both the *Tresor* and the *Rettorica*, a synthesis of his philosophical and literary ideas, and as such perhaps his most ambitious undertaking. Its metaphysical flight ultimately leads back to the city of man, devoid of its negative Augustinian connotations, because its harmony in Brunetto's Florence could not be vouchsafed by a leap of faith or by an appeal to the principles of Christian charity. Hence the recourse to a new Goddess, Natura, from whom flow all reason, order and justice. In reaching for this humanistic ideal, on the trail of Cicero, Boethius, Alanus de Insulis, and the Chartrians, Brunetto floundered, and the *Penetenza* can indeed be seen as a setback in the way in which the wayfarer seems to be overcome by the realization of the ultimate failure of this quest. Hence, the contradiction contained in the *Penetenza*, in its absolute rejection of all worldly ideals, including the *Tesoretto* itself. The theme of the *contemptus mundi* which pervades the first part of the *Penetenza* conveys a heartfelt feeling of frustration. The quest which had been sustained under the guidance of Natura, and had penetrated to the uppermost recesses of the abode of the Virtues, seems to flounder and be shipwrecked on the vision of the vanity of all things.<sup>16</sup>

The *Penetenza* appears to be not merely a pause in the journey to

philosophical enlightenment; nor is it a further step in that journey, ushering us perhaps to a possible *ascensus mentis in Deum*. Rather, it seems to represent a clear repudiation, on religious grounds, of the voyage itself. Yet, the confession ends and Brunetto resumes the voyage as it had been programmed by Natura. The quest for knowledge begins anew, but with a clear determination to avoid Ventura, or Fortune, thus confirming the earlier equation Amore-Ventura. Brunetto reaches Mount Olympus where he meets Ptolomey to whom he submits a question on the four elements on which Natura had already spoken. And here, on the threshold of a seemingly new beginning, the *Tesoretto* ends.

Brunetto's naturalistic and humanistic parameters, sketched out here with particular emphasis on the *Tesoretto*, given its undeniable resonance in *Inferno* 15, must be seen as the philosophical and theological dimension of the sin of sodomy. In the Amore episode Brunetto had put forth a view of love as a force which reduces men to the state of primitive beasts, and as an element which disturbs the cosmic equilibrium, a blind, irrational entity which threatens the eternal and immutable laws of Nature.

This naturalistic view is diametrically opposed to the essence of Dante's poetical, philosophical and theological doctrines, and amounts to a rejection of Beatrice in her salvational connotations. The notary's utter inability to comprehend the nature of Dante's voyage, implicit in his failure to seize on the allusions to Virgil and Beatrice, is a direct consequence of this rejection. Virgil's acceptance of the task of guiding the lost poet at Beatrice's request, on the other hand, typifies the explicit submission of reason to love:

"I' son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;  
vegno del loco ove tornar disio;  
amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.

Quando sarò dinanzi al signor mio,  
di te mi loderò sovente a lui."

Tacette allora, e poi comincia'io:

"O donna di virtù sola per cui  
l'umana spezie eccede ogni contento  
di quel ciel c'ha minor li cerchi sui,  
tanto m'aggrada il tuo comandamento,  
che l'ubidir, se già fosse, m'è tardi;  
piu non t'è uo' ch'aprirmi il tuo talento.

(*Inf.* 2.70-81)



This important passage, in which Virgil recognizes the salvational function of love, embodied by Beatrice as the "donna di virtù" (recalled by the pilgrim as "donna che saprà" in *Inferno* 15), also delineates precisely the movement, proceeding from the highest sphere of Heaven, by which love becomes the word ("amor mi mosse che mi fa parlare") and the force which propels mankind towards its goal beyond the confines of his worldliness. This spiritual dynamics of love can be actualized *only* through Beatrice-Grace whose instrument, Virgil, initiates the redeeming process of the pilgrim stranded in the "diserta spiaggia" (*Inf.* 2.62). The "sabbion," "landa," made of "rena arida e spessa" which eternally fixes the *locus* for Brunetto's damnation, is in clear juxtaposition to the desert in which the pilgrim Dante begins his own process of redemption.<sup>17</sup>

If Brunetto's repudiation of love is based on its irrationality, Dante's theory on the same subject, as first developed organically in the *Vita Nuova*, already presented signs of an attitude which is fundamentally at odds with Latini's. If we consider the beginning of "quella parte del libro de la [. . .] memoria," we can notice the younger poet's concern to establish the principle of a love which, far from being in conflict with reason, is in fact supported by it:

E avvegna che la sua imagine, la quale continuatamente meco stava, fosse baldanza d'Amore a signoreggiare me, tuttavia era di sì nobilissima virtù, che nulla volta sofferse che amore mi reggesse senza lo fedele consiglio de la ragione in quelle cose là ove cotale consiglio fosse utile a udire. (*V.N.* 2.9)

If the passage is important for the categorical nexus love-reason, in the *Vita Nuova* we find also the first unmistakable association of Beatrice with the Incarnation as expressed in the famous passage spoken directly to the heart by Love, which establishes a clear distinction, in typological terms, between her and Guido Cavalcanti's "monna Vanna":

Quella prima è nominata Primavera solo per questa venuta d'oggi; ché io mossi lo imponente del nome a chiamarla così Primavera, cioè prima verrà lo die che Beatrice si mosterrà dopo la imaginazione del suo fedele. E se anche vogli considerare lo primo nome suo, tanto è quanto dire 'prima verrà', però che lo suo nome Giovanna è da quello Giovanni lo quale precedette la verace luce, dicendo: 'Ego vox clamantis in deserto: parate viam Domini.' Ed anche mi parve che mi dicesse, dopo, queste pa-

role: "E chi volesse sottilmente considerare, quella Beatrice chiamerebbe Amore, per molta simiglianza che ha meco. (V.N. 24.4-5)

Beatrice's superiority over Cavalcanti's Giovanna, expressed here in biblically-inspired words, has more than a marginal bearing on Latini in *Inferno* 15. The "primo amico" of Dante's youth, and also, according to early humanistic tradition, Latini's disciple (Contini, *Poeti* 1:487), considered love to be a passion of the sensitive appetite, and therefore "for di salute." Approaching love from a naturalistic perspective, Cavalcanti was inevitably led to the conclusion that love, far from propelling man into a higher sphere of understanding, is a tyrannical force which debases his intellectual faculties.<sup>18</sup> A few lines from "Donna me prega," will reveal the relevance to our topic:

Move, cangiando—color, riso in pianto,  
e la figura—con paura—storna;  
poco soggiorna;—ancor di lui vedrai  
che 'n gente di valor lo più si trova.  
La nova—qualità move sospiri,  
e vol ch'om miri—'n non formato loco,  
destandos'ira la qual manda foco  
(imagnar nol pote om che nol prova).

(46-53)

The passage bears some striking similarities with the Amore episode from the *Tesoretto*. In both instability and irrationality are the dominant symptoms. Thus, in Brunetto's *locus amoris* "l'un giace e l'altro corre / l'un gode e l'altro 'mpazza, / chi piange e chi sollazza: / così da ogni canto / vedea gioco e pianto," (2211-2219) is picked up by Cavalcanti in the first line above. A complete line from the Amore section ("la forza d'amare / non sa chi no'lla prova," 2375) makes its appearance almost verbatim in Cavalcanti, above, and is also inserted in Dante's "Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare" (V.N. 26).<sup>19</sup> It seems not only possible, but probable, on the basis of the evidence, that in Dante's mind Brunetto and Cavalcanti were linked together for their common attitude to, and ultimate rejection of, love. Guido's "disdegno" for Beatrice in *Inferno* 10<sup>20</sup> certainly seems to acquire a fuller meaning when its analogy with Brunetto's repudiation of love and his consequent punishment are considered.

The link between *Inferno* 10 and *Inferno* 15 can be extended to include the figure of Farinata, whose "paternal" characteristic may

not be as obvious as that of Brunetto or Cavalcante. Yet it is clear that the greatness and magnanimity of Farinata, a majestic yet tragically flawed *pater patriae*, in his all too circumscribed view of politics, is undercut by naturalistic epicurean philosophy. In this sense he is Latini's kindred soul, whose own vision, political no less than philosophical, is impaired.

The tension between the Pilgrim and Farinata, which is political only at the most elementary human psychological level of the characters involved, manifests itself through words and images which find fuller expression in canto 15. I refer to Farinata's initial words to the Pilgrim:

O Tosco che per la città del foco  
vivo ten vai così parlando onesto,  
piacciati di restare in questo loco.

(10.22-24)

The initial *captatio benevolentiae* is echoed by Brunetto; but it is a similarity which can be extended to include the substance of the invitation to remain, to linger here in the "città del foco," just as Brunetto's request to the pilgrim has much the same objective. Similarly, the pilgrim's reaction to Farinata ("Io avea già il mio viso nel suo fitto") is echoed in the Brunetto episode:

E io, quando 'l suo braccio a me distese,  
ficcai li occhi per lo cotto aspetto,  
sì che 'l viso abbrusciato non difese  
la conoscenza sù a mio 'ntelletto.

(15.25-28)

and extends the thrust and force of the earlier line onto a semantic plane which has peculiarly aggressive undertones. It seems quite evident, moreover, that this passage is the culmination of a descriptive strategy which begins with the remarkable series of similes which serve as the prelude to the encounter. The first two ("Quali Fiamminghi . . . / temendo 'l fiotto che 'nver' lor s'avventa, / fanno lo schermo perché 'l mar si fuggia; / e quali Padoan. . . / per difender lor ville e lor castelli, / . . . a tale imagine eran fatti quelli") employ a "military" language to describe a seemingly natural violence against Brunetto. The next two similes appear to ease the harshness by the reference to the common and familiar:

quando incontrammo d'anime una schiera  
 che venian lungo l'argine, e ciascuna  
 ci riguardava come suol da sera  
 guardare uno altro sotto nuova luna;  
 e sì ver' noi aguzzavan le ciglia  
 come 'l vecchio sartor fa ne la cruna.

(16-21)

Here too, however, the deployment of the verb "to see" in its various forms from "riguardava" to "guardare," which becomes "aguzzavan," and then turns into the triumphalistic "ficca' li occhi per lo cotto aspetto," serves once again to alert us to the inherent ambiguity and deceptiveness of a situation which is not what it appears to be on the surface. The similes do indeed suggest "likeness" ("a tale imagine") and similarity; but they are only intended to lay the groundwork for the unmasking of the true malevolent reality of sin, which can at times assume the appearance of benevolence ("la cara e buona imagine paterna"). In this sense the "mala luce" of the epicureans is echoed here in the effort needed by the sodomites to see the pilgrim, in the pale light of the moon, also mentioned by Farinata in his prophecy ("la faccia della donna che qui regge," 10.80) and later by Ulysses ("Cinque volte raccessò e tante casso / lo lume era di sotto dalla luna," 26.130-131) as unmistakable references to the cold light of reason, unaided by Grace.

One can now perhaps see more clearly the relevance of linking the Brunetto episode to *Inferno* 10 by which Farinata and Cavalcante's "mala luce" and the notary's squinting eyes become metaphors which, juxtaposed to the penetrating eyesight of the pilgrim's intellect, serve to distance him from their "defenceless" and helpless sinfulness. The meaning of these consummately subtle and allusive intratextual references is put into even sharper focus if we take our attempt to develop the parallelism between the two cantos one step further. In *Inferno* 10 Virgil's stern advice to Dante following Farinata's disturbing prophecy concerning the exile, refers to Beatrice in terms which are meant to stress the spiritual blindness of Farinata and Cavalcante and which enhance her visional significance:

"La mente tua conservi quel ch'udito  
 hai contra te," mi comandò quel saggio;  
 "e ora attendi qui" e drizzò 'l dito:  
 "quando sarai dinanzi al dolce raggio

di quella il cui bell'occhio tutto vede,  
da lei saprai di tua vita il viaggio."

(10.127-132)

It is this lesson that the pilgrim will remember at the end of Latini's prophecy:

Ciò che narrate di mio corso scrivo,  
e serbolo a chiosar con altro testo  
a donna che saprà, s'a lei arrivo.

(15.88-90)

The pilgrim's words are a clear affirmation of the emerging consciousness of the superior dignity of his mission, and it is this confident assertion which elicits at this crucial moment the approval of the true "maestro" ("Bene ascolta chi la nota") who points the way to Beatrice.

By attributing to Brunetto the sin against nature, Dante could have found no more apt way of harnessing the old teacher's philosophical and allegorical notions against him. Even in his most rationalistic phase Dante espoused a concept of philosophy which stressed that aspect of it by which it becomes the love of God drawing man to Himself:

Filosofia è uno amoroso uso di sapienza, lo quale massimamente è in Dio, però che in lui è somma sapienza e sommo amore e sommo atto; che non può essere altrove, se non in quanto da esso procede. (*Conv.* 3.12.12)

In a real sense, therefore, any philosophical enquiry, which, like the *Tesoretto*, is not guided by love, is bound to pervert itself and imperil those to whom it is taught, since it is in the nature of philosophy to *be* love. It is with this same fundamental idea that Dante will close his great poem: "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" (*Par.* 33.145). Through this image, in which he resolves the key cosmological themes of classical and Christian traditions (Dronke), Dante further illustrates the immeasurable distance between Latini and himself. Canto 33 of the *Paradiso* also begins in a way which reminds us of Latini. But what an exquisite irony that the most effective and meaningful *annominatio* found in the allegory of the notary, "Natura-Fattura-Fattore,"<sup>21</sup> should reappear here and apply not, of course, to Natura, but to the Virgin, the woman who is the "mover" of the mission (Sarolli 289-91), and through whom salva-

tion has been made possible for all mankind:

Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio,  
umile e alta più che creatura,  
termine fisso d'eterno consiglio,  
tu se' colei che l'umana natura  
nobilitasti sì, che 'l suo fattore  
non disdegnò di farsi sua fattura.  
Nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore,  
per lo cui caldo ne l'eterna pace  
così è germinato questo fiore.

(*Par.* 33.1-9)

It is perhaps foolhardy to suggest that Brunetto's *annominatio* has made its way into the sublime prayer of St. Bernard in the *Paradiso*.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the images used here by Dante to describe the Incarnation, the central event in the history of man's redemption, focus on love in terms of fire whose warmth allows the germination of the flower-Christ, the event which makes possible the nobility of human nature. In direct juxtaposition to this stands Brunetto, "dell'umana natura posto in bando" (*Inf.* 15.81).

Another image in the *Convivio* is even more pertinent to the understanding of the punishment meted out to Brunetto ("Sovra tutto 'l sabbion, d'un cader lento, / piovean di foco dilatate falde, / come di neve in alpe sanza vento," *Inf.* 14.28-30), but in the second canzone of his treatise Dante is writing about the "donna gentile," lady Philosophy:

Sua bieltà piove fiammelle di foco,  
animate d'un spirito gentile  
ch' è creatore d'ogni pensier bono:  
e rompon come trono  
li 'nnati vizii che fanno altrui vile.

(*Conv.* 3; canz. 2.63-67)

In commenting on the image of the rain of fire, Dante explains it as "ardore d'amore e di caritate" (3.8.16), and concludes by restating about philosophy what he had already said: "E questo conferma quello che detto è di sopra ne l'altro capitolo, quando dico ch'ella è aiutatrice de la fede nostra" (3.8.20).

The pathetic figure of the notary, helplessly subjected to the fiery tongues of an infernal Pentecost, an apt *contrapasso* brought down upon his head by the rejection of love, is true to himself to the end:

unmindful of anything except his **limited** concept of glory, reminding his pupil of his works. If the opening lines of their encounter were an allusion to the *Tesoretto*, the epilogue is a narcissistic reminder of the *Tresor*, entrusted to the memory of the pilgrim. Just as his first words were ambiguously aimed at the arousal of the filial affection of Dante, his last are a more explicit expression of the desire to live through him. In the last lines of the canto the irony of the poet borders on parody as the notary is summarily dismissed:

“Sieti raccomandato il mio Tesoro,  
nel qual io vivo ancora, e più non cheggio.”

Poi si rivolse, e parve di coloro  
che corrono a Verona il drappo verde  
per la campagna; e parve di costoro  
quelli che vince, non colui che perde.<sup>23</sup>

(119–124)

The condemnation of Brunetto includes the central part of the canto, that is to say his political ideas. Latini's harsh diatribe against the Florentines (“Faccian le bestie fiesolane strame / di lor medesme. . .”), couched in images of extreme bestiality, while it enables the pilgrim to emerge with an affirmation of confidence in his mission, and trust in his guides, falls within the limited naturalistic horizon, political and ethical, of the notary. In the *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante relegated Latini, with other Tuscans, among the “municipal” poets (1.13). In an analogous way the political vision of the notary, by virtue of his sin, is confined to the violence and spiritual claustrophobia of Florentine politics.

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## NOTES

- 1 See for example Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* 2: 169: “Naturalmente la fama di questo cittadino, eminente ma come ce ne sono molti, riposa sull'episodio della *Commedia*.”
- 2 The following passage from the *Tresor* (2.2.102), on glory as a “second life” is a possible source for the verse: “Gloire est la bonne renomme, ki cort par maintes terres, d'aucun homme, de grant afere, ou de savoir bien son art. Ceste renomme desire chascuns, pour ce que sans lui ne seroit pas congneue . . . cil ki traitent de grans choses tesmoignent que gloire done au preudome une seconde vie; c'est a dire que après sa mort la renomme ki maint de ses

bones oeuvres fait sambler k'il soit encore en vie" (303). For Iannucci (*Forma ed evento*, esp. 100–103) the passage becomes the focus for the explanation of Latini's sin.

3 For Latini's life see Ceva and Sundby.

4 Cf. Mazzoni: "Maestro dunque [Latini] ad un' intiera città, non ad una scuola di ragazzi . . . fondando con la sua *Rettorica* le basi della prosa d'arte in Firenze, volgarizzando Cicerone, e insieme svelando ai giovani Fiorentini i segreti dell' *Ars dictandi*: quell' *Ars dictandi* che in Brunetto si coloriva anche delle personali esperienze transalpine, e che Dante epistolografo applicherà poi sempre strettissimamente, in maniera impeccabile" (xx). See also Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence," and "Brunetto Latini and Dante."

5 See, for example, Bosco: "In Brunetto Dante rimpiange la sua giovinezza" (115–16); also Sapegno in his introductory note to Canto 15 of the *Inferno*: "I ricordi di un'antica consuetudine e le professioni di filiale riconoscenza acquistano rilievo proprio da questa dolorosa presenza: la nostalgia della 'cara e buona imagine paterna' si colorisce di tanta tenerezza nel contrasto appunto di una realtà così diversa e brutalmente deformata . . ." (165–66).

6 The critics who generally adopt the "metaphorical" approach to explain *Inferno* 15 are the following: Montano, esp. 450 ff, Stocchi, Kay, Iliescu, Iannucci, Nevin, Mazzotta 73–9 and 138–41, Culbertson. Dante della Terza stakes out his own position by a careful weighing of the complexities of the episode: "L'ambiguità che risulta dalla sovrapposizione delle due personalità di Brunetto: quella proveniente dal suo discorso e quella legata al suo peccato, quella che risulta dal magistero del veggente e quella radicata nella umiliante presbiopia, nella 'malaluce' del dannato, e consustanziale al personaggio e perciò inalienabile ed irriducibile ad unità," (25); for a recent contribution which rejects the metaphorical approach to the question of Latini's sin, see Angiolillo. An important contribution to the question of Latini's "sodomy" is that of Avalle, who offers stringent literary evidence of it in an exchange of poems between Brunetto and Bondie Dietaiuti (86–106).

7 Upon hearing the news of the battle of Montaperti, the defeat of the Guelphs and of his subsequent exile, Brunetto had described his own *smarrimento*. I quote the relevant passage from Contini's edition of the *Tesoretto* 163–190:

Ed io, ponendo cura,  
tornai a la natura  
ch' audivi dir che tene  
ogn'om ch' al mondo vene:  
nasce prim[er]amente  
al padre e a' parenti,  
e poi al suo Comuno;  
ond'io non so nessuno  
ch'io volesse vedere  
la mia cittade avere  
del tutto a la sua guisa,



né che fosse in divisa;  
 ma tutti per comune  
 tirassero una fune  
 di pace e di benfare,  
 ché già non può scampare  
 terra rotta di parte.  
 Certo lo cor mi parte  
 di cotanto dolore,  
 pensando il grande onore  
 e la ricca potenza  
 che suole aver Fiorenza  
 quasi nel mondo tutto;  
 e io, in tal corrotto  
 pensando a capo chino,  
 perdei il gran cammino,  
 e tenni a la traversa  
 d'una selva diversa.

Two recent editions of the *Tesoretto* are by Ciccuto and Holloway.

- 8 There are many examples of this key *topos* in the *Consolation*. Two of the most telling follow, the first referring to the muses, shamed and scattered by Philosophy, and, in the same paragraph, to Boethius himself: "His ille chorus increpitus deiecit humi maestior uultum confessusque rubore uerecundiam limen tristis excessit. . . . Tum illa propius accedens in extrema lectuli mei parte consedit meumque intuens uultum luctu gravem atque in humum maerore deiectum. . . ." ["That company (i.e., the muses) thus checked, overcome with grief, casting their eyes upon the ground, and betraying their bashfulness with blushing, went sadly away. . . . Then she (Philosophy) coming nearer, sat down at my bed's feet, and beholding my countenance sad with mourning, and cast upon the ground with grief. . . ."] (132; 1.1.42–52).
- 9 Politics as the central focus of Latini's literary activity is best exemplified by his definition of it in the *Tresor* (317; 3.1.2) as "la plus haute science et . . . plus noble mestier ki soit entre les homes, car ele nous enseigne gouverner les estranger gens d'un regne et d'une ville, un peuple et un comune en tens de pes et de guerre, selonc raison et selonc justice." The indissoluble link between politics and, for Latini, its most indispensable handmaiden, rhetoric, is apparent from the following statement (21; 1.4.9): "retorique, cele noble science ke nous enseigne trover et ordoner et dire paroles bonnes et bieles et plaines de sentences selonc ce que la nature requiert. C'est la mere des parliers, c'est l'enseignement des diteours, c'est la science ki adrece le monde premierement à bien faire, et ki encore l'adresce par les predications de sain homes, par les divines escriptures, et par la loi ki les gens gouverne à droit et à justice" (21); see also Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* 2:122, where the *Tresor* is called "un manuale di formazione dell'uomo politico."
- 10 Becker argues convincingly that, at this time in history the "central locus" of

the poet, inevitably caught up in the secular life of the city, was "the notion that sacred events can be treated as historical episodes possessing the temporal dimension which renders them objectively real, i.e., having their locus in time and space as they are humanly conceived" (65–6 n. 1); this "secularization of virtue," which would become an important feature of Humanistic thought in the fifteenth century, is already present in Latini's concept of the nobility of the state. On Latini as a forerunner of the Humanists, cf. Rubinstein, Weiss and Ciccuto (6–16).

- 11 Latini's attack on the doctrine of courtly love was part of a wider doctrinal controversy, which culminated in the condemnation in 1277 by Stephen Tempier, bishop of Paris, of 219 "heretical" propositions which included Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore*: see Denomy, "The *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus and the Condemnation of 1277" and "'Fin' Amors"; the Pure Love of the Troubadors, Its Amorality, and Possible Source"; see finally the important observations by Corti, *La felicità mentale* 38–61.
- 12 For the iconographic tradition of the blind god of love, see the fundamental study by Panofsky, esp. 104–113, where the Blind Cupid is associated with Death and Fortune—the latter also being represented as blind—as implied in the *Tesoretto* 2179–2180 and 2891–2892. Panofsky shows that while the Blind Cupid as irrationality was a concept which appeared in the *Ovide Moralisè*, it is also present in Hrabanus Maurus (*De Universo* 15.6 [PL 3: 432C]): "Cupidinem vocatum ferunt propter amorem. Est enim daemon fornicationis, qui ideo alatus pingitur, quia nihil amantibus levius, nihil mutabilius invenitur. Puer pingitur, quia stultus est et irrationalis amor." But even this passage is literally copied from Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* 8.9.80). See also Patch 29 and 117–18.

- 13           Ma or pareo ritondo,  
              ora aveo quadratura;  
              or aveo l' aria scura,  
              ora è chiara e lucente;  
              or veggio molta gente,  
              or non veggio persone;  
              or veggio padiglione,  
              or veggio case e torre;  
              l'un giace e l'altro corre,  
              l'un fugge e l'altro caccia;  
              chi sta e chi procaccia,  
              l'un gode e l'altro 'mpazza,  
              chi piange e chi sollazza:  
              così da ogne canto  
              vedea gioco e pianto. (2204–2218)
- 14           Così fui giunto, lasso,  
              e giunto in mala parte!  
              Ma Ovidio per arte

mi diede maestria,  
 sì ch'io trovai la via  
 com'io mi trafugai:  
 così l'alpe passai  
 e venni a la pianura. (2388–2395)

See Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* 2: n. to 2359; see also Ciccuto, n. 193.

- 15 Such an interpretation, for example, is found in the commentary to the *Metamorphoses* of Arnulf of Orleans, according to whom Ovid seeks to “recall us from error to the recognition of the true creator”; see Ghisalberti, Viarre, Munari, Battaglia; finally, for the discussion of the links between this tradition and Dante, see Padoan.
- 16
 

Adunque, omo, che fai?  
 Già torna tutto in guai,  
 la mannaia non vedi  
 ch'ai tuttora a li piedi.  
 Or guarda il mondo tutto:  
 foglia e fiore e frutto,  
 angel, bestia né pesce  
 di morte fuor non esce.  
 Dunque ben pe ragione  
 provão Salamone  
 ch'ogne cosa mondana  
 è vanitate vana. (2495–2505)
- 17 For the centrality of the desert metaphor, see Singleton, “In exitu Israel de Aegypto,” but also the important contribution by Mazzotta, esp. 37–38.
- 18 For Cavalcanti's averroistic notion of love, see Nardi 190–219; also Picone 135–47; finally, the recent superb study of “Donna me prega” by Corti, *La felicità mentale* 3–37 which places the canzone in the context of “radical aristotelianism” (or averroism), and, also by Corti, *Dante a un nuovo crocevia* 77–101. It must be pointed out that, while Corti stresses the influence of the Aristotelians on Cavalcanti and Dante (especially, of course, on the former), not enough emphasis is placed on the neo-platonic tradition which weighs heavily on Latini, and which has its source in the School of Chartres. This is a point on which Nardi has some very valid observations (3–21), especially the following: “. . . lo stesso fondamento aristotelico comincia a manifestarsi nel secolo XII, come esito del platonismo di Chartres” (21).
- 19 G. Contini, “Cavalcanti in Dante” 155, calls this “uno dei suoi [Dante's] versi lirici più celebrati,” attributing its source to “Donna me prega.” The common source for both Dante and Cavalcanti seems, instead, to be the *Tesoretto*.
- 20 I take it for granted that Dante criticism has now accepted that the “cui” of *Inferno* 10.63 refers to Beatrice. I agree with Contini (*Cavalcanti in Dante* 148), who, while accepting this interpretation of the famous pronoun, states that “la sostanza della polemica, gnoseologica non meno che letteraria, non muterebbe comunque si traducesse cui: Virgilio o perfino Dio”; Corti arrives

at the same conclusion: "Molto si è scritto su quel *cui*, se vada riferito a Virgilio o a Beatrice; personalmente incliniamo per Beatrice, ma la cosa non conta molto perché sia Virgilio sia Beatrice qui sono simboli di un'operazione mentale ortodossa, teologicamente in regola: ragione al servizio della teologia e pronta a cedere il ruolo ad essa" (*Dante a un nuovo crocevia* 84-5).

- 21 I am referring to the first words spoken by Natura in the *Tesoretto*: "Io sono la Natura, / e sono una fattura del lo sovrano fattore" (289-91).
- 22 The formula, according to Auerbach, had become traditional by the twelfth century; cf. his important study "Dante's Prayer to the Virgin (*Par.* XXXIII) and Earlier Eulogies," now in *Studi su Dante* 263-92.
- 23 On the theme of the race in *Inferno* 15 and in the *Commedia* in general, see Werge, esp. 4-5.

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## Deceivers Deceived: Devilish Doubletalk in *Inferno* 21–23\*

In the course of their journey downward through the eighth circle of Hell, through the series of ten concentric ditches (*bolge*) which form the Malebolge, Dante the Pilgrim and his guide Virgil complete their observation of the diviners and move toward the bridge over the fifth *bolgia*, talking of matters that are not pertinent to the poem. The opening verses of canto 21 of the *Inferno* announce in their flowing, casual—one might even say, lighthearted—style the free-wheeling scene that is to come:<sup>1</sup>

Così di ponte in ponte, altro parlando  
che la mia comedia cantar non cura,  
venimmo; e tenavamo 'l colmo, quando  
restammo per veder l'altra fessura  
di Malebolge e li altri pianti vani.

(21.1–5)

As will be evident only later, the superficial lightness of these verses masks the profound seriousness of the events in these cantos, and, as such, it establishes from the beginning a sense of tension which will continue throughout the entire episode. The use of “comedia” is, on the one hand, a naming device (the poem is, after all, a “comedy” for reasons of content and style) and, on the other hand, a specific reference to the present episode and its presentation through a mixture of stylistic and lexical registers.<sup>2</sup> The reiteration of “ponte” serves to focus attention on what will prove to be the major concern of this episode—the search for a bridge over the sixth *bolgia*, the ditch in which the hypocrites are punished. And it is this quest that sets the action of cantos 21–23 in motion. The easy, rhythmical forward movement of these verses comes to an abrupt halt at the end of the second tercet when the Pilgrim declares what he saw, or better what he did *not* see: “e vidila mirabilmente oscura” (21.6). The darkness of the *bolgia* precludes easy comprehension of its features and inhabitants and may be taken as a sign of the perceptual and interpretive

difficulties of these cantos. The Pilgrim's lack of understanding is accompanied by a sense of fear suggested by the use of the adverb "mirabilmente"<sup>3</sup> and more clearly evoked by the adjective "oscura," which recalls to the reader's mind the "selva oscura" of *Inferno* 1 and its wealth of meanings and associations.<sup>4</sup>

The fifth *bolgia* of the eighth circle of Hell, wherein are punished those who were guilty of corruption in public office, appears to be a vast expanse of boiling pitch, similar to that employed in the Venetian shipyard:

Quale ne l'arzanà de' Viniziani  
bolle l'inverno la tenace pece . . .

. . .

tal, non per foco, ma per divin' arte,  
bollia là giuso una pegola spessa,  
che 'nviscava la ripa d'ogne parte.

(21.7-8, 16-18)

For the moment the Pilgrim sees nothing except the black pitch:

I' vedea lei, ma non vedëa in essa  
mai che le bolle che 'l bollor levava,  
e gonfiar tutta, e riseder compressa.

(21.19-21)

In addition to the long introductory simile, the play in this passage on seeing and not seeing ("I' vedea lei, ma non vedëa in essa," 21.19), which suggests the potentially deceptive nature of appearances, establishes a context of suspense and sets the stage for the unexpected and, more specifically, for the unpleasant surprises that await the unsuspecting Pilgrim and his guide.

Dante's contemplation of the pitch is interrupted by Virgil's imperative words ("Guarda, guarda!" 21.23), which warn him of the approaching devil, and his protective gesture: "mi trasse a sé del loco dov' io stava" (21.24). The four verses that describe the Pilgrim's response to Virgil's command are carefully constructed to convey the sense of anxiety induced by fear and to depict that state of tension between the simultaneous desire to see and to flee from the thing feared:<sup>5</sup>

Allor mi volsi come l'uom cui tarda  
di veder quel che li convien fuggire  
e cui paura súbita sgaagliarda,



che, per veder, non indugia 'l partire.

(21.25–28)

As will become apparent as the episode unfolds, these verses are also monitory, for they conjure certain spectres—objects and persons to be avoided, the paralyzing power of fear. Moreover, they present sound counsel—the necessity of flight, the dangers of delay. In short, they anticipate the deceit perpetrated by Malacoda, the leader of the devils, and the very real danger of physical harm posed by the devils, the Malebranche.

A brief summary of the principal events of these cantos follows. With Dante and Virgil looking on, a devil arrives bearing a barrator from Lucca whom he unceremoniously throws into the boiling pitch (21.29–46). The demons on the bank engage in devilish words and antics with this particular sinner (21.47–57). Attempting to conceal Dante's presence, Virgil meets with and tries to learn from the devils and their leader, Malacoda, if there is a passage across the sixth *bolgia* (21.58–87). His presence disclosed, the Pilgrim comes forward into the devils' presence (21.88–105), and Malacoda tells an elaborate story, part truth and part fiction, concerning the bridges over the sixth *bolgia* (21.106–114). Traveling in the perilous company of the devils (21.115–139; 22.1–30), Dante and Virgil encounter Ciampolo, a barrator from Navarre, whom the devils have captured (22.31–96). With a clever ruse Ciampolo tricks the devils and jumps back into the pitch (22.97–123), and two devils (Alichino and Calcabrina), angered over his escape, come to blows and fall into the pitch (22.124–151). Left to their own devices, Dante and Virgil move ahead and, suddenly pursued by the Malebranche, narrowly escape harm by sliding down into the sixth *bolgia* (23.1–57).

Taking great care to protect his charge from the devils, Virgil orders him to hide “dopo uno scheggio, ch'alcun schermo t'ia” (21.60) and assures him of his control over the situation:

“e per nulla offension che mi sia fatta,  
non temer tu, ch'i' ho le cose conte,  
per ch'altra volta fui a tal baratta.”

(21.61–63)

The irony of Virgil's bold assertion (“i' ho le cose conte,” 21.62) will be apparent only later, for at this point in the narrative neither he nor we the readers can foretell the course of events. Further emphasis

is placed on the necessity of his maintaining an external show of confidence—"mestier li fu d'aver sicura fronte" (21.66)—especially in view of the assault on him by the devils:

Con quel furore e con quella tempesta  
 ch'escono i cani a dosso al poverello  
 che di súbito chiede ove s'arresta,  
 usciron quei di sotto al ponticello,  
 e volser contra lui tutt'i runcigli.

(21.67-71)

The image evoked of Virgil as a poor beggar accurately describes the true nature of the situation and undermines the picture of strength and confidence that he wished to present. Attempting to reestablish his authority, Virgil asks that the devils send their leader to hear him out:<sup>6</sup>

"Nessun di voi sia fello!  
 Innanzi che l'uncin vostro mi pigli,  
 traggasi avante l'un di voi che m'oda,  
 e poi d'arruncigliarmi si consigli."

(21.72-75)

Unanimously proclaimed as their representative, Malacoda moves forward and utters a rhetorical question ("Che li approda?" 21.78), which clearly suggests that Virgil's words will have no influence on their actions. Virgil's confident words to Malacoda are similar to the formulaic *passé partout* that he had employed—successfully—with Charon, Minos, and Plutus:<sup>7</sup>

"Credi tu, Malacoda, qui vedermi  
 esser venuto . . .  
 sicuro già da tutti vostri schermi,  
 senza voler divino e fato destro?"

(21.79-82)

However, Virgil has apparently forgotten his unsuccessful attempt in dealing with the demons who denied them entry to the city of Dis (*Inf.* 8-9).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, he is so confident about the efficacy of these words with their reference to divine grace that he is willing to put his trust in the enemies of God. Furthermore, despite his initial concern for the Pilgrim's safety (to the extent that he ordered him to hide and not reveal his presence), Virgil discloses too much information too soon. Without receiving any guarantee of safe passage or assistance

and without even waiting for a response from Malacoda, he proceeds to betray the Pilgrim's presence:

"Lascian' andar, ché nel cielo è voluto  
ch'i' mostri altrui questo cammin silvestro."

(21.83-84)

Malacoda's response to these words is a masterpiece of theatricality, designed to convince Virgil of his "sincerity": He *appears* to be crestfallen ("Allor li fu l'orgoglio sí caduto," 21.85); he dramatically drops his instrument of torture ("... e' si lasciò cascar l'uncino a' piedi," 21.86) and says in a mock show of acquiescence: "Omai non sia feruto" (21.87).<sup>9</sup> Virgil is taken in, deceived by these actions and words. Throughout this episode the Poet carefully draws and develops the contrast between Virgil's rational activity and the Pilgrim's instinctive response to events.

From the moment he joins his guide, Dante the Pilgrim senses the devils' malevolence in their words and actions:

... io mi mossi e a lui venni ratto;  
e i diavoli si fecer tutti avanti,  
sí ch'io temetti ch'ei tenesser patto.

(21.91-93)

The sense of tension and dread which permeates the episode is enhanced by the use of a strikingly vivid military image:

cosí vid'io già temer li fanti  
ch'uscivan patteggiati di Caprona,  
veggendo sé tra nemici cotanti.

(21.94-96)

Critics are generally agreed that this passage contains some reliable autobiographical information: As a member of the army of Tuscan Guelphs, Dante participated in the siege and eventual surrender of the castle of Caprona (August 16, 1289) and witnessed the safe passage of the terrified Pisan soldiers from the castle under the supervision of the Florentine troops.<sup>10</sup> The fear evoked by this reference is made even more real and palpable, for the roles of captor and captured have been reversed: while there at Caprona Dante was the victorious observer, here in Hell he recognizes his subordinate and powerless position as similar to that of the Pisan troops offered safe-conduct.

The words and gestures of the devils are at once menacing and

playful:

Ei chinavan li raffi e "Vuo' che 'l tocchi,"  
diceva l'un con l'altro, "in sul groppone?"  
E rispondien: "Sí, fa che gliel' accocchi."  
(21.100-102)

After the devils are named, Dante's suspicions about their intentions are heightened:

"Omè, maestro, che è quel ch'i' veggio?",  
diss'io, "deh, senza scorta andianci soli,  
se tu sa' ir; ch'i' per me non la cheggio.  
Se tu se' sí accorto come suoli,  
non vedi tu ch'e' digrignan li denti  
e con le ciglia ne minaccian duoli?"  
(21.127-132)

Virgil discounts these visible signs of danger, reiterating his command over the situation. Nevertheless, his response is only partially correct and, to be sure, only partially reassuring to the Pilgrim:

"Non vo' che tu paventi;  
lasciali digrignar pur a lor senno,  
ch'e' fanno ciò per li lessi dolenti."  
(21.133-135)

This is then the extended prelude to the grotesque and dramatic events of these cantos.

Extending over two and one third cantos, this longest single episode in the *Inferno* has been the subject of much discussion, much of it devoted to the nature of comic elements and *comicità* in the poem.<sup>11</sup> The scene in the fifth *bolgia* has been likened to those presented on the stage in contemporary religious dramas, particularly in the transalpine regions, and the interaction here between "performers" (devils, sinners) and "observers" (Dante, Virgil) most probably derives from those interludes in medieval plays when the "devils" would run about among the audience, inspiring both laughter and fear.<sup>12</sup> In the *Inferno*, of course, there is no such "interlude," no "intermission" in the performance, and although the *dramatis personae* do not wear masks and costumes, they do successfully conceal their intentions under the cover of duplicitous words. Indeed, the ever-present, diabolical undercurrent attacks the superficially "festive" atmosphere and gradually subverts it.<sup>13</sup>

From the earliest commentaries on the poem to the present day critics have noted Malacoda's deceitful ways—his story about the bridges over the sixth *bolgia* (21.106–114) and his “promise” of safe conduct (21.125–126). The success of the devil's first lie derives from its presentation—the lie is embedded in the truth:

... “Piú oltre andar per questo  
iscoglio non si può, però che giace  
tutto spezzato al fondo l'arco sesto.  
E se l'andare avante pur vi piace,  
andatevene su per questa grotta;  
presso è un altro scoglio che via face.  
Ier, piú oltre cinqu' ore che quest' otta,  
mille dugento con sessanta sei  
anni compié che qui la via fu rotta.”

(21.106–114)

As Malacoda truthfully reports, there are no bridges across the *bolgia* of the hypocrites (21.106–108) because of the earthquake that occurred at the moment of Christ's crucifixion (21.112–114). However, by bracketing the false story of the “altro scoglio che via face” (21.109–111), these two truths condition it and make it appear as though it, too, were true. Malacoda's fraudulent promise of safe conduct for Dante and Virgil depends directly on the embedded lie in his first speech:

“costor sian salvi infino a l'altro scheggio  
che tutto intero va sovra le tane.”

(21.125–126)

Since there is no other “scheggio,” the command that “costor sian salvi” until that point has no weight and is, in short, no guarantee at all. However, the two wayfarers do not yet know the true nature of the situation, and, in fact, at this point neither does the reader. With our annotated editions of the *Commedia* it is easy to forget that Dante expected his text to be read, understood, and responded to on its own terms. He expected his readers to experience the poem in an immediate and unmediated fashion and, thus, to be caught up in its drama, to be assailed by the same fears, doubts, and questions that confront the Pilgrim. The vast commentary tradition that has grown up around the text of the *Commedia* should serve as an aid to our interpretation of the text, but not as a substitute for it, for the text is what Dante

wrote and what he expected us to read and evaluate. This is certainly not to deny the utility and, indeed, the necessity—especially for modern readers who generally lack an adequate medieval cultural preparation—of bringing other texts to bear on the meaning of the *Commedia*, but only to remind us that the first readers of the poem encountered it on the manuscript page and generally without any critical or interpretative apparatus, although these glosses began to appear even in the first decades following Dante's death.

In this episode where appearances are not always what they seem, Dante demonstrates that language, too, can be used in an ironic or deceitful fashion,<sup>14</sup> that it can be used and misused, that it can both reveal and conceal. Our perception of the events in cantos 21–23 is determined in large part by two contradictory thematic currents: devilish playfulness and diabolical cunning. On the one hand, the devilish antics, or *diableries*, seem to provide the mainstay of the action, affecting all the participants and reducing them to a common denominator. On the other hand, since every coin has two sides, the *rovescio* of this “innocent” activity may be glimpsed from time to time in the machinations contrived both by the devils (Malacoda's lie which aims to entrap Dante and Virgil) and by the sinners (Ciampolo's ruse calculated to free himself from the Malebranche). There are in simultaneous operation, then, two levels on which the events of these cantos should be understood: 1) grotesque humor and 2) profound seriousness, the latter underlying and consistently undermining the former.

Several factors contribute to the successful representation of this duality. One is the basic and ironic dichotomy between appearance and reality. Dante extends the opening simile by describing the intense activity in the Venetian shipyard:

Quale ne l'arzanà de' Viniziani  
 bolle l'inverno la tenace pece  
 a rimpalmare i legni lor non sani,  
 ché navicar non ponno—in quella vece  
 chi fa suo legno novo e chi ristoppa  
 le coste a quel che più viaggi fece;  
 chi ribatte da proda e chi da poppa;  
 altri fa remi e altri volge sarte;  
 chi terzeruolo e artimon rintoppa—.

(21.7–15)

The impression created by this image is one of openness, energy and productivity, and consequently this well-populated scene in the Arsenal contrasts sharply both with the seemingly deserted *bolgia* and, further, with the unproductive and secretive undertakings of the grafters.<sup>15</sup> As in life these secular counterparts to the simonists (who are punished in the third *bolgia*), ignoring the greater and more important needs of the state, thought only of personal gain, so here in Hell they continue their nefarious operations in darkness (under the pitch) and with deceit (the tricks played on their guardians, the Malebranche). The nature of the *contrappasso* has, therefore, a direct relationship to the overall structure of the episode. By concealing the sinners, the pitch itself—bubbling, hot and black—presents a false appearance, which initially “deceives” the Pilgrim as to its true content.

Another manner of enhancing the duality of vision in these cantos involves the use of certain parodic elements.<sup>16</sup> The “trumpet” blast, on whose note canto 21 ends (“ed elli avea del cul fatto trombetta,” 139), gives rise to the marvellous mock-heroic introduction to canto 22 (vv. 1–12), where Dante, by “elevating” this “diversa cennamella” (22.10), effectively lowers it to its proper level and underscores its base nature.

The recurrent use of animal imagery also helps to maintain the tension between the calm and tumultuous, the playful and the threatening. The movement and position of the sinners are described respectively as those of dolphins (22.19) and frogs (22.26), and even here there is the hint of danger. Although they come to the surface “ad alleggiar la pena” (22.22), which is ostensibly a beneficial activity, the sinners are compared to

... i dalfini, quando fanno segno  
a' marinar con l'arco de la schiena  
che s'argomentin di campar lor legno.

(22.19–21)

The warning that dolphins give sailors of an impending storm suggests the violence that is lurking behind the devils' calm exterior appearance, as well as the very dangerous nature of this presumably salutary movement.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the image of the frogs that remain

... a l'orlo de l'acqua d'un fosso  
... pur col muso fuori,

sí che celano i piedi e l'altro grosso

(22.25–27)

reminds the reader that there is a hidden, secret part that lies below the surface, that there is more to the scene than meets the eye. The one sinner—Ciampolo—who falls into the hands of the devils is described as a “lontra” (22.36), which, sleek, black-skinned and playful, is here the prize of a deadly hunt. His fate at the hands of the devils is aptly characterized by another animal image: “Tra male gatte era venuto 'l sorco” (22.58). In addition to the dual level of superficial playfulness and underlying seriousness which all these images convey, linguistic duplicity contributes to the prevailing ambiguous atmosphere in which the distinctions between appearance and reality are blurred.

The cleverness with which Malacoda constructed his tale about the bridges over the sixth *bolgia* is matched and perhaps even surpassed by that of Ciampolo, the grafter from Navarre, who, true to his manipulative earthly ways, tricks the devils at their own game: he tries to corrupt them through bribery. As is customary in the *Commedia*, Ciampolo tells Dante the Pilgrim about his earthly existence and discloses the identity of other sinners in this *bolgia*. By answering questions such as these, the Navarrese barrator is able to forestall the mutilation and torment which the devils wish to inflict upon him. At the end of his speech Ciampolo calls the wayfarers' attention to the devil Farfarello's menacing look:

“Omè, vedete l'altro che digrigna;  
i' direi anche, ma i' temo ch'ello  
non s'apparecchi a grattarmi la tigna.”

(22.91–93)

Given a momentary reprieve from attack, the grafter from Navarre, who is referred to ambiguously at this critical point in the narrative as “lo spaurato” (22.98),<sup>18</sup> continues his conversation with Dante and Virgil, taking advantage of their presence to devise a scheme which will ultimately deceive both wayfarers and devils. He first offers to have other sinners come to the surface to speak with Dante and Virgil:



"Se voi volete vedere o udire

...

Toschi o Lombardi, io ne farò venire."

(22.97, 99)

But before a response can be made, he continues, seizing on this as the pretext for the second part of his plan: the Malebranche must withdraw behind the bank to ensure that the sinners not fear further torment when they come to the surface:

"ma stieno i Malebranche un poco in cesso,  
sí ch'ei non teman de le lor vendette."

(22.100–101)

Ciampolo then discloses that the sinners have a secret all-clear signal which they customarily use in order to know when they might safely come to the surface of the boiling pitch for some relief:

". . . io, seggendo in questo loco stesso,  
per un ch'io son, ne farò venir sette  
quand' io suffolerò, com' è nostro uso  
di fare allor che fori alcun si mette."

(22.102–105)

Although initially addressed to Dante and Virgil and carefully crafted to appeal to their regional predilections ("Toschi" for Dante, "Lombardi" for Virgil), Ciampolo's offer to summon additional souls caters directly to the devils' obviously greedy desire to do injury to as many sinners as possible. And the 700% rate of return is certainly attractive.<sup>19</sup> These words are ambiguous: Is Ciampolo describing an actual practice? Or is he merely contriving a clever ruse to escape the clutches of the devils, to regain his freedom, relatively speaking, in the boiling pitch? Cagnazzo, another of the devils, perceives the possibility of a trick:

". . . "Odi malizia  
ch'elli ha pensata per gittarsi giuso!"

(22.107–108)

Ciampolo, who is described here as a consummate master of deceit ("ei, ch'avea lacciuoli a gran divizia," 22.109), responds in what has generally been taken to be a declaration of his "malvagità":

". . . "Malizioso son io troppo,  
quand' io procuro a' mia maggior trestizia"

(22.110–111)

and, consequently, of his remorseful recognition that this action will bring harm to his companions. To arrive at this sense, we must understand that Ciampolo, to present a convincing self-image, took the devil's term "malizia" (= "astuzia") and modified its form and meaning ("malizioso" = "malvagio, cattivo") to suit his purpose.<sup>20</sup> Another possible reading of this verse is offered by Sapegno, who, recognizing that he is in the minority on this matter, would retain the equation "malizia" = "astuzia" and interpret Ciampolo's response as ironic:<sup>21</sup>

Oh che malizioso sopraffino son io, che, con la mia malizia, procuro ai miei compagni maggior dolore, esponendoli alle vostre offese!

In addition to the ambiguity surrounding the interpretation of "malizioso," there are problems attendant in the following verse regarding the meaning of "maggior." While almost all modern critics read "maggior" as an adjective modifying "trestizia," some of the early commentators would have it associated with "a' mia" and to refer thus to Ciampolo's fellow barrators who were of greater renown.<sup>22</sup> For example, Francesco da Buti glosses these verses as follows:<sup>23</sup>

*Malizioso son io troppo; ecco che confessa esser malizioso nel modo che dirà, per compiacere a' demoni, Quand'io procuro a' miei maggior trestizia; cioè a quelli che sono sotto la pegola, il quali finge esser maggiore di sè, per farne più desiderosi li demoni i quali sono più vaghi di schernire e di straziare li grandi spiriti, che li piccoli, e questo disse Ciampolo, perchè li demoni si scostassono più volentieri, com'elli volea, per gittarsi giuso.*

However, in addition to these two possibilities, I believe there is another, equally valid way of interpreting Ciampolo's response, one that remains very close to the letter of the text and accords well with the sort of linguistic duplicity and ambiguity which is present throughout this episode. Very simply, I would suggest that in verse 111 Ciampolo says two quite different things, depending on how the line is read and how the parts are construed, the key term, in my view, being "maggior." The apparent sense of the phrase, the one that Ciampolo wants the devils to understand—and what they do understand—is "quand' io procuro a' mia [pause] maggior trestizia" (= "when I cause greater torment to my companions"). The

other sense of the phrase, the “real” or underlying “true” meaning as Ciampolo would want it—and the one eventually realized—is “quand’ io procuro a’ mia maggior [pause] trestizia” (= “when I cause my superiors [i.e., those who are in command, the devils] torment”).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the shifting meaning of “malizioso” in verse 110 would then change in accordance with these two models, so that in the first instance it would mean “malvagio” and in the second “astuto.” We will recall that at the end of the episode Ciampolo succeeds in escaping from the devils: he does not whistle, nor do any other sinners appear. The Navarrese barrator jumps into the pitch, and two devils (Alichino and Calcabrina), enraged at this deceit, grapple in aerial combat with each other, and fall thus entangled into the pitch, at which point Dante and Virgil depart on their own, leaving them “così ’mpacciati” (22.151).

In verse 111 Ciampolo thus combines truth and illusion into a single, but ambiguous whole, whose meaning is now one thing and now another, depending on how it is read and understood. Just as Malacoda conditioned Dante and Virgil’s response by embedding a lie in the middle of truthful statements, so the Navarrese barrator, with his own special linguistic trick, turns the tables on his captors and does them one better. However, rather than planting what will be eventually recognized as a blatant lie in the middle of the truth—a ploy we admit was efficacious for Malacoda—Ciampolo devises a much more subtle linguistic strategem, for the meaning of his words shifts or perhaps better, evolves, chameleon-like, depending on the way they are perceived and on their context. Indeed, it is only in retrospect that we the readers, like Dante the Pilgrim, can reflect on and perceive the true intention of Ciampolo’s words.

Hindsight is generally completely accurate, and Dante the Pilgrim engages in just such a retrospective moment at the beginning of canto 23, when he considers the events he has just witnessed (in cantos 21–22) and compares them with the beginning and the ending of Aesop’s fable of the frog and the mouse:<sup>25</sup>

Vòlt’ era in su la favola d’Isopo  
 lo mio pensier per la presente rissa,  
 dov’ el parlò de la rana e del topo;  
 ché piú non si pareggia “mo” e “issa”  
 che l’un con l’altro fa, se ben s’accoppia

principio e fine con la mente fissa.

(23.4–9)

There has been a long and sustained controversy over the precise application of the fable to the events in cantos 21–22, and, by having his character, the Pilgrim, give a retrospective reading and interpretation of a situation, Dante the Poet provides us with guidance as to how we as readers should approach this particular text in order to ferret out its proper meaning. By inviting us to consider his text in the light of another text—Aesop’s fable—the Poet points to the more general problems of interpretation which the first experience with events or the first reading of a text presents. The Poet is showing through the figure of the Pilgrim that we are all susceptible to deception, that appearances may indeed be deceiving, and that we may get at the truth of the matter only through rereading and reevaluating a text or a situation. Commentators have long noted that the relationships of the protagonists in the fable to those in the *Commedia* are ambiguous, and the several proposed solutions disclose these interpretative problems.<sup>26</sup> The most common interpretation would have Alichino as the mouse, Calcabrina as the frog, and the pitch—the “sghermitor” (22.142)—as the kite. However, in his important study Larkin stresses the “complete innocence of the intended victims” and the “gratuitousness of the treachery” and proposes that Dante and Virgil who seek to cross the *bolgia* are the mouse, the devils who seek to deceive them are the frog, and the pitch that ensnares the malefactors in the end is the kite.<sup>27</sup> He elaborates:

The tale has four essential stages: 1) the mouse comes to a barrier, 2) the mouse seeks the aid of the frog, 3) the aid is granted but with betrayal in mind, 4) the frog comes to grief through his own craftiness and because of the mouse. Stated in these terms, it is evident that Dante’s fear springs from his review of the final stage of the fable: the demons (frog) come to grief through their own craftiness and because of Dante and Virgil (the mouse). . . . just as the mouse had come to the stream, so Dante and Virgil arrived at the fifth *bolgia* which they could not traverse without the aid of the demons who controlled it. They request assistance; so, too, did the mouse. The frog appeared to aid the mouse but was in reality plotting its destruction. The devils likewise grant assistance to the pilgrims, but when these two later learn of Barbariccia’s [*sic*: Malacoda’s] cunning lie about the condition of the bridges. . . , it is evident that behind this apparent co-operation lay the desire to entrap the pair, thus confirming the fears which Dante had from the beginning. Finally, just as the frog’s own

malice was the cause of its disaster, so that same malicious nature which sought to ensnare Dante and Virgil brought the demons to grips above the pitch. Dante becomes terrified after viewing the events of *Inferno* XXII in light of the fable, because as the mouse was the innocent accessory to the frog's misfortune, so Dante and Virgil were the unwitting springboard of Ciampolo's escape, for their questioning of him triggered the chain of events which culminated in the sinner's flight and the fall of Alichino and Calcabrina into the pitch.<sup>28</sup>

Singleton's criticism of this solution is well-taken, for Larkin's proposal does not respect "the all-important distinction between Dante the character in the poem and Dante the poet," attributing knowledge to the Pilgrim that he does not yet have, that is, that he (as the mouse) already knows of Malacoda's (the frog's) treachery.<sup>29</sup> Singleton attempts to justify this "oversight" by noting that the Pilgrim "can and does know the evil intent of the devils, since they are evil by their very nature; he is aware of their 'ill-will' [23.16] and fears that they will also be wrathful, since they have been put to scorn; this suspicion must serve as sufficient evidence of their intent to deceive."<sup>30</sup> While this may be the case, I believe that a more consistent reading of this entire episode, at least along the lines that I have been developing in this essay, would be to look at the Pilgrim's reflections on the fable and its relationship to the events in this *bolgia* exactly as they are described, i.e., as a concatenation of thoughts.

The Pilgrim's attention is called to the fable because of the "presente rissa" (23.5) between the two devils and their subsequent fall into the pitch. Given Dante's assurance that there is no exact and absolute equation between these events and the fable ("ché più non si pareggia 'mo' e 'issa,'" 7), Larkin rightly notes that they are "alike in significance but different in form."<sup>31</sup> No matter which version of the fable is meant, the image of the conclusion (the "fine") is reasonably accurate: if the mouse and frog are both eaten by the kite, then the two devils are "swallowed up" by the pitch; if only the frog is eaten and the mouse set free (as in *Marie de France*), then the devils are "swallowed up" by the pitch and Ciampolo escapes. The moral lesson is thus guaranteed, for the evildoers receive their proper punishment: the fiendish devils fall into the pitch, and even if Ciampolo (as the mouse) is "free" he has only "escaped" to return to his usual state of punishment. The image of the beginning is, as Larkin suggests, that of Dante and Virgil's desire to cross the *bolgia*

and their encounter with the devils, the mouse's wish to cross the water and its meeting with the frog. In his two-part, temporally retrograde reflections, the Pilgrim first considers the end ("fine"), the "rissa," and then the beginning ("principio"), their arrival at the *bolgia*. From these two separate moments arise a concatenation of two thoughts which very logically yield a third:

E come l'un pensier de l'altro scoppia,  
cosí nacque di quello un altro poi,  
che la prima paura mi fé doppia.

(23.10-12)

The objective analysis that the Pilgrim performs on the last and then on the first events of these cantos and their relationship to the fable and its moral causes him to become apprehensive, for he understands only too clearly the paradigm of deception leading to ultimate destruction, which the fable presents and which is suggestively paralleled by the recent events he has witnessed. The third thought which intensifies his first fear ("che la prima paura mi fé doppia," 23.12) goes back to their initial encounter with the devils and causes him to reevaluate their general attitude and demeanor in light of their subsequent actions and the perceptive and persuasive account given in the fable:

Io pensava cosí: "Questi per noi  
sono scherniti con danno e con beffa  
sí fatta, ch'assai credo che lor nòi.  
Se l'ira sovra 'l mal voler s'agguetta,  
ei ne verranno dietro piú crudeli  
che 'l cane a quella lievre ch'elli acceffa."

(23.13-18)

Even though the Pilgrim will not be aware of Malacoda's actual deception until the end of canto 23, his initial suspicions are more or less confirmed, and he again expresses his fear to Virgil:

. . . "Maestro, se non celi  
te e me tostamente, i' ho pavento  
d'i Malebranche. Noi li avem già dietro;  
io li 'magino sí, che già li sento."

(23.21-24)

There is in these words a flurry of references to concealment, to external appearances and internal realities, all of which serve to

heighten the vibrant state of tension which permeates the first third of this canto. Even more importantly, this passage summarizes the dichotomy of appearance and reality so dominant in cantos 21–22 as a way of preparing for the encounter with the hypocrites, who are, of course, excellent examples of the perils of deceptive language. In fact, when Virgil says “S’i’ fossi di piombato vetro” (23.25), the image is very similar to and, indeed, anticipates the way in which the hypocrites will appear with their cloaks gilded on the outside and leaden within:

Elli avean cappe con cappucci bassi  
 dinanzi a li occhi, fatte de la taglia  
 che in Clugní per li monaci fassi.  
 Di fuor dorate son, sí ch’elli abbaglia;  
 ma dentro tutte piombo, e gravi. . . .

(23.61–65)

Claiming to be able to read the Pilgrim’s mind, Virgil shares his concern about the Malebranche and offers a *possible* plan by which they may escape, *if* their fears are realized:

. . . “S’i’ fossi di piombato vetro,  
 l’image di fuor tua non trarrei  
 piú tosto a me, che quella dentro ’mpetro.  
 Pur mo venieno i tuo’ pensier tra ’miei,  
 con simile atto e con simile faccia,  
 sí che d’intrambi un sol consiglio fei.  
 S’elli è che sí la destra costa giaccia,  
 che noi possiam ne l’altra bolgia scendere,  
 noi fuggirem l’imaginata caccia.”

(23.25–33)

Scarcely does Virgil mention the “imaginata caccia” (23.33) when the Malebranche suddenly appear in hot pursuit of the wayfarers who escape by sliding precipitously down into the sixth *bolgia*.<sup>32</sup>

Virgil’s action—picking Dante up and holding him firmly as he slides down the bank—is instinctive, aptly likened to the mother who rescues her child from a house fire. This contrasts with the rational counsel he gave in vv. 31–33, whereby if the configuration of the land were such that they could descend into the next *bolgia*, then they would in order to escape the “imaginata caccia” (23.33). The tentative, conditional nature of Virgil’s plan and the sudden necessity of rapid action would seem to indicate that he did not take

the Pilgrim's fear too seriously.

It is not until the end of canto 23 that Dante and Virgil learn to the latter's chagrin the truth about the bridges over the sixth *bolgia* and, thus, about Malacoda's lying words and ways. The sarcastic words spoken by the hypocrite Catalano chide Virgil for his apparent naivete in dealing with devils:

. . . "I' udi' già dire a Bologna  
del diavol vizi assai, tra 'quali udi'  
ch'elli è bugiardo e padre di menzogna."  
(23.142-144)

In the fifth *bolgia* devils and sinners are equated symbolically through their mutual immersion in the pitch. The common ground of both groups is their incessant love of sinister play and deceitful stratagems. They co-exist in a constant state of tension determined in large part by the simultaneous and interactive currents of playfulness and seriousness and enhanced by ambiguous gestures and words which only hint at the truth of the matter. Upon entering this *bolgia*, Dante and Virgil, too, are caught up in this state of tension, and their albeit momentary association with the denizens of this infernal zone is aptly suggested by the proverbially inspired tercet:

Noi andavam con li diece demoni.  
Ahi fiera compagnia! ma ne la chiesa  
coi santi, e in taverna coi ghiottoni.  
(22.13-15)

Malebolge is, of course, the place in Hell where those guilty of simple fraud are punished, and the concentration on the use and misuse of language in cantos 21-23 complements the attention given this matter in the eighth circle, especially with the panderers and seducers, the flatterers, the diviners, the hypocrites, the false counsellors, the sowers of discord, and the liars.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the representation of barratry, the episode in the fifth *bolgia* is calculated in part to describe the workings of fraud and in part to show how language can be used rightly—to represent truth—and wrongly—to deceive through half-truths and lies. In this episode devils and sinners coalesce, and strange and shifting alliances are formed among devils, sinners, and wayfarers. Would-be deceivers deceive and are deceived, just as their innocent victims are deceived precisely through the duplicitous use of language, and it is often only in retrospect that they—and we



the readers—are able to discover the truth that has been so carefully concealed behind the veil of words or within the very texture of the words themselves.

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## NOTES

- \* The research for this essay was accomplished during a period of fellowship support provided by Newberry Library (Chicago) and the National Endowment for the Humanities.
- 1 All passages from the *Commedia* follow the Petrocchi edition.
- 2 For Dante's use of the term "commedia" and its changing meaning, see *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 2.4.5–6, and the Letter to Can Grande (*Epistola* 13.28–31) [in *Opere minori*], as well as Quaglio 79–81. See also *Inferno* 16.128.
- 3 See Anceschi.
- 4 Another recall to the initial, fearful stage in the journey is found in Virgil's words to Malacoda, in which he discloses that his mission is to lead Dante on "questo cammin silvestro" (21.84; cf. *Inf.* 2.142).
- 5 The Pilgrim's intense fear which continues throughout these cantos is perhaps a reflection of an episode in his life. On January 27, 1302, Dante was accused and condemned, in absentia, of having committed several crimes during his terms of office as Prior (June 15–August 15, 1300), and among these a charge of barratry.
- 6 In these four verses all the verbs are in the subjunctive mood, and some have an impersonal passive sense. Perhaps the absence of the indicative mood and active verbs would suggest a lack of force on Virgil's part, and this would in turn indicate his eventual defeat at the hands of the devils.
- 7 See *Inferno* 3.94–96; 5.21–24; 7.8–12.
- 8 Commentators have noted the similarity between these two scenes. Sapegno, for example, notes the moral dimension of this episode: "Si ripete . . . in diversa forma, la situazione già sperimentata dei due pellegrini davanti alle mura di Dite: la ragione umana, in Virgilio troppo fiduciosa di sé, è naturalmente vinta, come là dalla tracotanza, così qui dall'astuzia dei diavoli; la paura di Dante, che è in ultima analisi più ragionevole e avveduta, qui è un elemento positivo della situazione e diventerà da ultimo una delle forze risolutive dell'intreccio drammatico" (236).
- 9 Many critics view Malacoda's response as serious. See, for example, the opinion of Giuseppe Giacalone, who includes in his commentary portions of a *lectura Dantis* by Scolari: "Allora l'orgoglio di Malacoda cadde d'un tratto, si afflosciò tanto che lasciò cascare l'uncino ai piedi. 'La terzina è grave, con accenti pesanti, con intensità sonora decrescente e rallentamento del ritmo, sino all'esclamazione di Malacoda. *Omai*: ora che c'è di mezzo la volontà di

Dio, non c'è più nulla da fare, dobbiamo lasciare che vada' (Scolari, 23). La situazione stessa dell'impotenza in cui è ridotto l'orgoglio del diavolo, dopo aver fatto intendere che a nulla avrebbe approdato il colloquio, diventa di per sé comica dinanzi al lettore, senza che D[ante] abbia avuto alcuna intenzione di comicità" (419).

- 10 For further information, see Saffiotti Bernardi.
- 11 Among the works I have consulted are all the major early (Francesco da Buti, Guido da Pisa, the Ottimo, et al.) and modern commentators (Scartazzini, Sapegno, Singleton, Bosco-Reggio, Giacalone, et al.), as well as the following general *letture* or specific studies of the cantos in question (see Works Cited): Bacchelli, Baglivi and McCutchan, Bertoni, Cesareo, Chiappelli, Chiari, Chini, Del Beccaro, Della Giovanna, Favati, Montano, Needler, Olschki, Pagliaro, Pietrobono, Pirandello, Principato, Roncaglia, Ryan, Sacchetto, Salinari, Sanguineti, Sannia, Sarolli, Scolari, Sozzi, Spitzer, Targioni Tozzetti, Turri, and Wolf.
- 12 Favati 41–50, Nash 247, Olschki 80, and Owen.
- 13 Note the language used to describe the devils' treatment of the Lucchese barator, to whom they yell after he has been thrown into the boiling pitch: "Però, se tu non vuo' di nostri graffi, / non far sopra la pegola soverchio" (21.50–51), and, after they impale him with their forks, they say in a very colloquial manner: "Coverto convien che qui balli, / sí che, se puoi, nascosamente accaffi" (21.53–54). Their activity with this sinner is described in kitchen terms: "Non altrimenti i cuoci a'lor vassalli / fanno attuffare in mezzo la caldaia / la carne con li uncin, perché non galli" (21.55–57). In addition to the similarity between this description and the representation of Satan and his minions as cooks in an infernal kitchen who busy themselves roasting souls, there is a homey, almost comic quality to the scene. For the so-called "kitchen humor," see Curtius 431–435.
- 14 Litotes is incorporated for ironic effect, as, for example, when the devil declares that everyone in Lucca is a "barattier, *fuor che Bonturo*" (21.41, emphasis mine). Bonturo Dati was, of course, the most notorious criminal of all.
- 15 On the other hand, Salinari, for one, views the scene in the Arsenal as "il simbolo del movimento e del lieto agitarsi dei diavoli e dei dannati pur fra tante atrocità che sono più affermate che rappresentate" (626).
- 16 For the role that religious art plays in this parodic structure, see Kleinhenz.
- 17 For this characteristic of the dolphin, see, e.g., Jacopo Passavanti, *Specchio della vera penitenza*: "quando vengono notando sopra l'acqua del mare, appressandosi alle navi, significano che tosto dee venire tempesta" (cited by Sapegno in his commentary, 247).
- 18 In terms of the dual nature of the narrative and the double meaning of words, it is especially significant that this deceiver (Ciampolo) on the verge of perpetrating his deception should be identified with a term that has two possible meanings, each of which presents a different face to the audience. Sapegno

glosses “lo spaurato” with “il pover **N**avarrese atterrito,” but notes “Ma c’è anche chi spiega: ‘uscito di paura, non più spaventato’, sia perché rassicurato dalle parole di Barbariccia contro Farfarello, sia perché già fiducioso di sfuggire ai diavoli con la sua astuzia” (251). In line with the reading of the episode set forth here I would argue that the term is intentionally ambiguous and that both interpretations are true, but at different times and for different reasons. Given his present circumstances (even though he has narrowly avoided harm from Farfarello), Ciampolo must still be quite terrified, or at least he must *appear to be so*, if he is to convince the Malabranche of his earnestness. In the end, he will, in retrospect, appear to have been “no longer afraid” because he knew he would successfully deceive them.

- 19 This figure is, of course, merely approximate, for, following biblical examples (e.g., Proverbs 24:16), Dante uses seven here and elsewhere to indicate an indeterminate number (cf. *Inferno* 8.97).
- 20 For this interpretation, see, among others, the note in the commentary by Giacalone: “Ciampolo, vedendosi scoperto, insiste di più nella sua finzione, e cambia le carte in tavola al diavolo, attribuendo alla parola *malizioso* il senso di ‘malvagio,’ mentre il diavolo intendeva dire ‘astuto.’ Con questo espediente egli fa credere a Cagnazzo che avverte già il rimorso di esser così malvagio da procurare ai suoi compagni, oltre a quello della pece, il tormento (*tristizia*) degli uncini” (435).
- 21 Sapegno 251.
- 22 Among other early commentators, Guido da Pisa translates: “Malitiosus sum ego nimis, quando maioribus meis procuro inferre tristitiam” (419). The *Ottimo Commento* notes the ambiguity in the interpretation: “Questo testo alcuni spongono maggiori, cioè mie’ maggiorenti; alcuni spongono miei, cioè miei compagni, maggior tristizia procuro di quella ch’elli abbiano” (392–393).
- 23 Da Buti, Vol. 1:579.
- 24 This use is the same as that in *Purgatorio* 33.25–26: “color che troppo reverenti / dinanzi a suo’ maggior parlando sono,” where *maggior* is “sostantivato, a indicare ‘superiore per grado e autorità’ ” (Lanci 765).
- 25 For an excellent treatment of this allusion and its function within the entire episode, see Larkin, “Another Look,” with the corrective appraisal of Singleton 390–393. Other attempts at interpretation include the following: Padoan, and Larkin, “*Inferno* XXIII.” The version of the fable given in the *Romulus* collection is as follows: “Mus dum transire vellet flumen, a rana petiit auxilium. Illa grossum petiit linum, murem sibi ad pedem ligavit, et natare coepit. In medio vero flumine rana se in deorsum mersit ut miserrimo vitam eriperet. Ille validus dum teneret vires, milvus e contra volans murem cum unguibus rapuit, simul et ranam pedentem sustulit. Sic enim et illis contingit qui de salute alterius adversa cogitant” (text cited in Singleton 391). The moral of the fable is certainly appropriate to the present events, for those who thought maliciously to harm others are brought to a bad end. The conclusion in Marie de France’s version of the fable is slightly different; there the kite devours

the frog and sets the mouse free:

Li escufles par cuveitise  
la suriz lait, la reine ad prise.  
Mangie l'ad e devoree,  
e la suriz est deliveree.

(Marie de France, *Fables*, Fable 3, vv. 79–82).

- 26 For an overview of the various proposed solutions, see Larkin, "Another Look."
- 27 Larkin, "Another Look" 98–99.
- 28 Larkin, "Another Look" 97–98.
- 29 Singleton 392.
- 30 Singleton 392–93.
- 31 Larkin, "Another Look" 99.
- 32 I would suggest the possibility of a double play on the word "imaginata" which refers primarily to the pursuit which first Dante and then Virgil "imaged," i.e., conceived in their mind; however, the term might also suggest that Virgil views the Pilgrim's thought as fantasy, as a purely hypothetical point. According to this second sense, Virgil, despite his grandiloquent claims, would not yet fully understand the danger that they are in or that there has been some double dealing in recent events. Again, the language hints that there are two levels at play in the text.
- 33 On the general question of the interconnections of language and sin, see Ferrante.

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## Dante's Nose and Publius Ovidius Naso: A Gloss on *Inferno* 25.45

*For Kevin Brownlee and Roy Rosenstein\**

Io scrittore [l'Ottimo commentatore] udii dire a Dante, che mai rima nol trasse a dire altro che quello ch'avea in suo proponimento; ma ch'elli molte e spesse volte faceva li vocaboli dire nelle sue rime altro che quello, ch'erano appo gli dicatori usati di sprimere. (*L'ottimo commento* 183)

Ovid appears as an ostensibly minor character in one brief but highly charged episode of Dante's *Commedia*, that of the Pilgrim's and Virgil's encounter with the famous poets who constitute "la bella scola" in Limbo. After Homer and Horace, "Ovidio è 'l terzo, e l'ultimo Lucano" (*Inf.* 4.90).<sup>1</sup> Although the author of Dante's primary source-book for mythology (the *Metamorphoses*) receives a scant hemistich of attention and will be mentioned by the name of "Ovidio" only one other time in the *Commedia* (*Inf.* 25.97), an authorial interjection near the end of the fourth canto bears on the question of how significant Ovid as an *auctor* really may be for Dante. In *Inferno* 4.145–47 the Poet states that his lengthy task keeps him from discoursing as much as he should about the souls he sees:

Io non posso ritrar di tutti a pieno,  
però che sì mi caccia il lungo tema,  
che molte volte al fatto il dire vien meno.

The comment "that many times the telling comes short of the fact" challenges the reader to consider, if nothing else, which of the souls in Limbo may have far-reaching significance not only in history but also in Dante's divine poem. What follows is a modest attempt to add to the burgeoning evidence that, for the *Commedia*, Ovid is as important an authority as Virgil—not only in the *Paradiso*, where the *Metamorphoses* strikes some as a nearly ubiquitous palimpsest far eclipsing the *Aeneid* as a subtext, but also at other crucial junctures of the poem, such as *Inferno* 25 where the issue of "poetando" (Dante's word in vs. 99) is dramatically addressed.<sup>2</sup>

*Inferno* 25 marks the passage of Dante the Character and his prodig guide Virgil to the seventh *bolgia* of the eighth circle, the pouch of the transmuting thieves. The canto ends with Vanni Fucci's meteorologically dense and woefully dark prophecy of the expulsion of the White Guelphs from Florence, the event which results in Dante the Poet's exile. The spiteful thief climaxes his speech in the opening *terzina* of canto 25 with a blasphemous ejaculation directed towards God: a screamed vulgarity and obscene gesture with upraised hands. A serpent immediately silences Vanni by coiling itself tightly around his neck, "come dicesse 'No vo' che più diche'" (6), the first in a series of "silencings" in a canto resonating with poetic voices. A second snake simultaneously wraps around and immobilizes the thief's arms. There follow, in vss. 10–33 and in quick succession, a bitter invective against Pistoia, the thief's hometown; a parting comment about Vanni's rebelliousness and swift departure from sight; and a description of the arrival and actions of the dragon-bedecked centaur Cacus, who both guards and is punished in this *bolgia*.

The late Charles Singleton in his commentary states that Dante's Cacus distinguishes itself from that of the Virgilian and Ovidian tradition by being a centaur (rather than a "half-human," as in *Aeneid* 8.194) and by having a fire-belching dragon on its back (rather than emitting flames from its own mouth, as in *Aeneid* 8.198–99). He asserts, in addition, that the underlying text for Virgil the Guide's remarks about Cacus (25–33) comes from the eighth book of the *Aeneid*, 190ff., and he deemphasizes (unfortunately, in my view) Ovid's role in the Dantean narrative.<sup>3</sup> Ettore Paratore, on the other hand, stresses that when Virgil the Guide tells Cacus's story, some details are decidedly Ovidian; for instance, Cacus is clubbed to death (as in Ovid's *Fasti* 1.575–78) rather than strangled (as per Virgil's *Aeneid*). Paratore finds such a correction highly notable "in quanto il ricordo dell'episodio è posto proprio in bocca a Virgilio" (93–94). I agree and believe that such a modification is only a shadow of things to come. Dante the Poet, in other words, makes Virgil the Character replace a detail found in his Latin epic with one traceable to the Ovidian *Fasti*; this act anticipates, on one hand, Dante the Character's remarkable silencing of his Guide and, on the other, Dante the Poet's replacement of the *Aeneid* as a subtext in the remainder of this virtuoso canto of metamorphoses.



In narrative sequence *Inferno* 25 next records that, as Virgil continues to speak, three spirits (Agnello, Buoso, and Puccio) arrive and ask who the Pilgrim and Guide are and where one of their own number, Cianfa, was left behind (34–43). Virgil, who was previously discoursing, does not have time to respond before Dante silences him with a finger to his lips or, as vs. 45 details the action, with a finger from (Dante's) chin to nose: "mi puosi 'l dito su dal mento al *naso*" (emphasis added here and later).

This gesture, later found illustrated in Renaissance emblem books as a symbol of *silentium* (see illustration), never receives an extensive gloss, and commentators almost always follow the same lines. In brief, they emphasize a literal interpretation of the gesture and offer no suggestion that Dante may be engaging in subtle but significant wordplay.<sup>4</sup> Fourteenth-century commentators find the Pilgrim's silencing action as basically that and little more. L'Ottimo states, quite succinctly, that Dante "fa certo segno a Virgilio, perchè stea attento" (1: 429). Da Buti simply remarks that the finger from chin to nose is "uno atto che l'uomo fa, quando vuole ch'altrui stia cheto et attento, quasi ponendo stanga e chiusura alla bocca" (1: 646). Seravalle, near the beginning of the fifteenth century, writes that the placing of a finger "a mento usque ad nasum" is a "signum optimum ad reddendum aliquem attentum" and that Dante has made a recognizable "actum meditationis" (311). That the act is an important sign or referent I readily agree.

In our own century Natalino Sapegno, in his magisterial commentary, says that "Dante fa segno a Virgilio di tacere, perchè ha udito nominare Cianfa e ha compreso che quel gruppo di dannati dev'essere formato da suoi concittadini" (278). Singleton remarks, "Dante places his forefinger over his lips in the familiar gesture urging silence" (2: 436). More recently, in the Bosco-Reggio commentary, we read that "il gesto, naturalissimo, è per imporre silenzio a Virgilio, perché avendo sentito il nome di Cianfa Donati, Dante comprende trattarsi di Fiorentini" (368). Last of all, the Pasquini-Quaglio gloss simply paraphrases the verse as "feci un cenno (mimico) di silenzio" (294).<sup>5</sup>

As early as the fifteenth century, however, at least one classical parallel had been adduced for *Inferno* 25.45. Christophoro Landino describes the Pilgrim's action as a "cenno pel quale dimostriamo vol-

*In Silentium.*

*Cum tacet haud quicquam differt sapientibus amēs,  
 Sultitiæ est index linguaq; uoxq; suæ.  
 Ergo premat labias, digitoq; silentia signet,  
 Et sese pharium uertat in Harpocratem.*

Illustration from *Livret des Emblemes de maistre Andre Alciat mis en rime francoyse e presente a monseigneur Ladmiral de France* (sic) (Paris: Chrestien Wechel, 1536). Courtesy of Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

ere che si faccia silentio" and cites, as an analogue, Juvenal's "digito compesce labellum" [put your finger to your lip] (*Satire* 1.160). This citation, although not at all popular in today's commentaries, did find its way into the eighteenth-century commentaries of P. Pompeo Venturi and Baldassare Lombardi, who credits Landino with the original observation (Venturi 313; Lombardi n. pag.). In the mid-nineteenth century, Tommaseo refers readers to a more likely classical source: *Metamorphoses* 9.692 (212). Somewhat later in the Ottocento, G. A. Scartazzini, after noting that the verse under discussion is a "gesto naturale di chi chiede silenzio," cites the same Ovidian passage (244). The line in Ovid occurs in the story of Ligdus and his pregnant wife Telethusa. Just before giving birth at midnight, the wife has a dream-vision in which she sees various Egyptian gods, including one who enjoins silence with his finger ("quique premit vocem digitoque silentia suadet").<sup>6</sup> This Egyptian god of silence is Harpocrates, whose name appears in other classical poets, such as Catullus (74.4 and 102.7).<sup>7</sup> The detail perhaps implied in Ovid but nevertheless missing is exactly where Harpocrates places his finger; the Loeb translation of the *Metamorphoses* suggests that it is "on his lips." Surely this is where Dante the Character places his finger as well, but Dante the Poet insists on wording the description so that the finger's position is from chin to nose ("dal mento al naso"). In a gesture suggestive of an Ovidian passage, Dante's nose and the word *naso* are both emphasized, the first by having a finger pointed at it and the second by occurring in rhyme position. But what are we to make of this emphasis and how unusual is it?

The word *naso* appears eight times in the *Commedia*, although never in the lofty *Paradiso*. The appearances occur in *Inferno* 17.75 (when the usurer Reginaldo Scrovegni sticks out "la lingua, come bue che 'l naso lecchi"), 18.108 (when the stench of the flatterers' *bolgia* is such "che con li occhi e col *naso* facea zuffa"), 25.45 (when, as noted, Dante silences Virgil by placing ". . . 'l dito su dal mento al *naso*") and 128 (when the serpent-thief Guercio de' Cavalcanti transforms his superfluous snakeskin into a ". . . *naso* a la faccia"), and 28.65 (in the description of Pier da Medicina who has ". . . 'l *naso* tronco infin sotto le ciglia"); in *Purgatorio* 7.113 (when Carlo d'Angiò is referred to periphrastically as ". . . colui dal maschio *naso*"), 10.62 (when, on the first cornice, Dante refers to his

senses of sight and smell metonymically as “. . . li occhi e 'l naso”), and 15.7 (when, on the second cornice, the rays of sun strike Dante and Virgil in full face or “. . . per mezzo 'l naso”). Although in all three occurrences in the *Purgatorio* the word is in rhyme position, in the *Inferno* only at 25.45 does the word appear in rhyme, and in the *Commedia* as a whole only in *Inferno* 25 does *naso* appear twice in the same canto, thus ultimately calling more attention to its presence there. While Luciano Graziano in the *Enciclopedia dantesca* claims that the word is always used “in senso proprio,”<sup>8</sup> I shall argue that its appearance in 25.45 also constitutes a play on Ovid’s last name: Publius Ovidius *Naso*. My reasons for such a gloss are summarized in the six sections which follow.

(1) After Dante the Character silences Virgil the Guide, Dante the Poet completely replaces the *Aeneid* with subtexts by Ovid and Lucan, though especially by Ovid, for the remainder of this particular canto. (Cf. *Inf.* 25.58–60 [image of ivy clinging to a tree] and *Metam.* 4.365 [the same image]; *Inf.* 25.69–72 [Cianfa the snake and Agnello the man] and *Metam.* 4.373–79 [Salmacis and Hermaphroditus]; *Inf.* 25.97 [Cadmus and Arethusa] as well as 25.103–08 [the series of infernal metamorphoses] and *Metam.* 4.576–80, 586–89 [Cadmus] and 5.572–641 [Arethusa].) The pointing to the *naso*, therefore, is not only a sign to Virgil the Guide to be silent but also a signal to the reader that (Publius Ovidius) *Naso* is about to replace Virgil the Poet as *auctor* for the canto’s remaining verses. That *naso* is meant to capture the reader’s attention is attested by the remarkable address which follows immediately in the next tercet (46–48):

Se tu se' or, lettore, a creder lento  
ciò ch'io dirò, non sarà maraviglia,  
ché io che 'l vidi, a pena il mi consento.

Not only is the reader addressed in vs. 46 (as “tu” and “lettore”) but Dante the Poet is heard in the future tense in vs. 47 (“io dirò”) and then the Pilgrim is represented in the past tense in vs. 48 (“vidi”). Perhaps because of this close juxtaposition of the reader to an almost fused Pilgrim-Poet, at least one major commentator has even interpreted the Pilgrim’s gesture to Virgil in vs. 45 as an early warning signal to the *reader* to pay closer attention to narrative action about to transpire.<sup>9</sup> No commentator has suggested that the gesture invites deeper interpretation than that. But Dante assuredly silences

Virgil, narratively and textually, so that the reader may discern more clearly the somewhat altered voice of Ovid echoing through the Italian verses. Perhaps what has previously hindered readers from surmising as much is the paradoxical ordering of *Ovid* to be silent later in the canto, a problem I shall treat next.

(2) The subsequent appearance, in vs. 97, of Ovid's name in unique rhyme position ("Taccia di Cadmo e d'Aretusa Ovidio") makes explicit the Latin poet's importance to this canto of dramatic transformations, as does the canto's subject matter. Dante was acutely aware of the nature of Ovid's chief work and even recorded the title of the *Metamorphoses* as *De Rerum Transmutatione* in *De monarchia* 2.7.10. Certainly in a canto dealing with the "transmutations of things," such as *Inferno* 25 is, it would be appropriate that *naso* signify both itself and something else. That Dante is commanding Ovid, too, to be silent ("Taccia . . . Ovidio") should not surprise the reader nor undermine my argument. The silencing of Ovid, in contrast to that of Virgil, is not a silencing on the level of narrative action or imagery. Rather it must be recalled that Ovid's silencing is done in a rhetorical fashion (the Latin convention of *taceat* is documented by Curtius [162–65]) calculated to call attention to his name and that, in point of fact, the rest of the canto resounds with reworked Ovidian passages.

Does Dante, then, only pretend to silence Ovid, or is the classical poet truly silenced in some other sense? The traditional response is that Dante, while incorporating Ovidian (and Lucan) passages, outdoes Ovid (and Lucan) in the number and complexity of transformations and can, therefore, claim to silence the boasts of his predecessors. While such may well be the case, I believe the purported silencing serves two other functions. First, it actually dramatizes the close poetic connection between Ovid and Dante: both recognized that the craft of making verse is very similar to the acts of metamorphosis their poetry describes. Second, the *taccia*-sequence points to the ultimate difference between classical poetry of transmutation and Christian poetry of conversion and transfiguration. For the reader to recognize these two facts, however, Ovid's name and poetry must be very much in the forefront of the reader's mind—hence the play on Ovid's last name (in truth, a metamorphosis) and the even bolder placement of "Ovidio" in rhyme with "io non lo 'nvidio" (99). (Note,

too, that "lo 'nvidio" contains the name "Ovidio" within it and that Ovid's name is dismembered and remembered in every "io vidi"—"Ovidii," Latin genitive for "of Ovid"—as in vss. 48, 112, and 142 of *Inferno* 25 but also throughout the *Commedia*.) The Christian poet performed a similar (admittedly inverted but nevertheless effective) act of comparison at the outset of his poem (*Inf.* 2.32) when he had the Pilgrim claim to be neither Aeneas nor St. Paul (thereby intentionally drawing attention to them); later of course he introduces numerous parallels to make it clear that the Pilgrim is a figure of both Aeneas and St. Paul. (*Inferno* 2.32 also encourages us to reread the drowning sailor simile of *Inferno* 1.22–27 in light of Aeneas's shipwreck at the beginning of the *Aeneid* and also of St. Paul's as detailed in Acts 27.)

(3) Dante knew the *cognomen* of Ovid and even referred to him as Naso in *Epistola* 3.4 in a significant phrase referring to the authority of the Latin poet: "Auctoritatem vero Nasonis" (2:534). But even had Dante not indicated in his writings that he was keenly aware of Ovid's last name, it is impossible that he could not have known it given the extraordinary medieval debate over exactly what Naso signified. In Ghisalberti's exhaustive study of medieval biographies of Ovid, the classicist quotes from numerous manuscripts which discuss possible rationales for Naso as a *cognomen*, from the possibility that it referred only to the size of his nose to the likelihood that it referred symbolically to his wisdom (10–59).<sup>10</sup> The probability that Dante would have been familiar with and seriously attracted to such discussions is very high. In addition to the large number and widespread locations of the medieval manuscript biographies of Ovid, I need only cite Dante's own *Vita Nuova* dictum that "names are the consequences of things" ("nomina sunt consequentia rerum") and his own preoccupation with the meanings of names (e.g., Giovanna and Beatrice) from the very beginning of his poetic career. Consider also the care with which he introduces souls whose names are remarkably appropriate, given their punishment or state, from Pier della Vigna (who as a suicide has become precisely a tree) to Costanza (who appears in the lunar sphere ironically because of her lack of constancy).

(4) That Dante is capable of such wordplays as I am arguing for is widely known. In addition to his obvious play on VOM (man)

in the famous *Purgatorio* 12.26–63 acrostic, I would cite the more subtle case of *Inferno* 8.62, where “l fiorentino spirito bizzarro” refers not only to Filippo Argenti but also to the irascible spirit of the Florentine people. But perhaps the most germane example, for my purposes, occurs with the probable double meaning of “omero” in *Paradiso* 23.65:

Ma chi pensasse il ponderoso tema  
e l'omero mortal che se ne carica,  
nol biasmerebbe se sott' esso trema.

As R. A. Shoaf insightfully points out in his discussion of this passage, the mortal shoulder is “also the mortal Homer (‘omero’ / ‘Omero’ —*Inf.* 4.88), mortal because blind.” Shoaf argues that “Dante, with this pun, is at once bold and humble: bold to say he is Homer; humble to assume the mortality implied by Homer’s blindness” (70).<sup>11</sup> Certainly the attitude of both Pilgrim and Poet in *Inferno* 25 also underscores the boldness of both Dantes—the Pilgrim when he points to his own nose and silences his guide Virgil and the Poet when he commands both Lucan and Ovid to be silent about their prowess as he is about to outperform both of them and to show how metamorphoses may illustrate God’s purposes.

A question to entertain but parenthetically at this point: if Dante truly puns on the names of Homer and Ovid, then why does he not perform something similar for Virgil, given that poet’s fundamental role in the *Commedia*? Thanks to a reminder from Professor Rachel Jacoff of Wellesley College, I can refer the interested reader to potential play in the case of Virgil (read Vergil) in *Inferno* 9.89’s reference to the Angelic Messenger’s “verghetta” and in *Inferno* 20.44’s allusion to Tiresias’s “verga.” As Robert Hollander states in his informed discussion of *verga*, *virga*, and Virgil in “The Tragedy of Divination in *Inferno* 20”: “[i]n both *Inferno* 9 and 20 Dante summons up the shade of Virgil’s involvement with divination . . .” (183).<sup>12</sup> Given the far-flung medieval speculations on the etymology of Virgil’s (or Vergil’s) name (not to mention the superstitions tying him to magic), it seems probable that the infernal appearances of *verghetta* and *verga* are intended to remind us of the Roman poet’s suspected connection with divination. Such wordplays, if intentional, certainly would help prepare the ground for Dante’s more pointed pun on Ovid’s last name in *Inferno* 25.

(5) Dante draws clear attention to two other personages in his poem by reference to their noses. In *Purgatorio* 7, in the Valley of the Princes episode, Carlo d'Angiò (Charles I of Naples) is referred to as both "maschio naso" (vs. 113) and as "nasuto" (vs. 124), while Philip III of France is called "nasetto" (vs. 103). Because of the medieval exegetical tradition which associated the nose with the gift of discernment (cf. St. Gregory<sup>13</sup>), the implications of Dante's referring to two mighty princes by their unusual nasal characteristics are intriguing. Those confined to the Valley of the Princes are rulers whose preoccupation with worldly affairs kept them from more eternally rewarding activities; they must pay in Ante-Purgatory for the skewed perspective they had while alive. Their abnormal noses—one oversized and one undersized—may well reflect iconographically their distorted discernment in spiritual matters. For even if a large nose, as in the case of Charles I, may be interpreted *in bono* as a sign of sagacity, his lack of earthly wisdom would still make of his "maschio naso" a most ironic statement. The whole *nasuto-nasetto* episode induces the attentive reader to re-evaluate for symbolic meaning previous noses in the *Commedia*, especially the Wayfarer's, and raises the distinct possibility that noses and characters may be closely linked in Dante's poetic imagination.<sup>14</sup>

(6) As an elaboration on and extension of my fifth argument, I should like to close by calling attention to Dante's artistic propensity for identifying or describing so many of his characters by reference to some memorable or distinct part of their physical anatomy. Consider, as a few scattered examples in the *Inferno* alone, the emphasis on Beatrice's eyes (2.55); the hands of Virgil and the Pilgrim as the latter is initiated into the secret things of Hell (3.19); the mouths of Francesca (5.136), Ugolino (33.1), and Satan (34.55); the chest (and brow) of Farinata (10.35) and the *petto* of Mohammed (28.29); the eyebrows of the sodomites when we first meet them (15.20) and later the private parts of one in particular (15.114); the feet and legs of the simonists (19.23) and later of Judas (34.63) and even Satan (34.90); the tongue and teeth of the ten demons and the arse of their leader (21.137–39); the severed nose, slit throat, and missing ear of Pier da Medicina (28.64–66); and the head and hair of Archbishop Ruggieri (33.2–3).

Why does Dante record so many physical characteristics of souls



who are, after all, temporarily without bodies (except for the Pilgrim)? Almost all of the anatomical parts alluded to have been discussed in the literature that abounds on Dante, and the most obvious answer is that the medieval Poet/Artist was keenly aware of the iconographic possibilities inherent in poetry, especially allegorical poetry. (He exploits those possibilities quite self-consciously and perhaps even more masterfully in the "visibile parlare" of *Purgatorio*.) He saw in the various body parts not only a way to make vivid his portrayal of dead souls but also an opportunity to introduce, naturally and in most cases unobtrusively, potent icons or symbols into his poem. When the Poet chooses to highlight one of those physical characteristics, it is especially incumbent upon the reader to ask, "Why this detail and why here?" And so readers have been doing for centuries. The problem with the Pilgrim's gesture to his *naso* in *Inferno* 25.45 is that it works so well literally that it has not been heretofore elevated to the status of crux and begged for close scholarly attention. Yet purposefully placed in one of the most plastic and theoretical of cantos, *naso* requires not only a literal interpretation but also a gloss that at least commences to take into account the larger context of Dante's poetic iconography as well as his dynamic relationship with all his *auctores*. If my particular reading of *naso* disturbs, I can only plead as did the Poet before me (*Inf.* 25.142–44):

Così vid'io la settima zavorra  
mutare e trasmutare; e qui mi scusi  
la novità se fior la penna abborra.

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## NOTES

- \* The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of all faculty and fellow participants in the first Dartmouth Dante Institute, held June 30 - August 10, 1985, and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. In particular, I should like to note the encouragement and enthusiasm of that year's director, Kevin Brownlee. The original idea for the gloss of "naso" as a pun on Ovid's name belongs to DDI participant Roy Rosenstein of The American College in Paris. I listed him as co-author of this article until referees pointed out that the responsibility for writing, arguing, and presenting the gloss must lie with the actual writer, arguer, and presenter. While accepting full liability

for any shortcomings in the manner in which I have glossed *Inferno* 25.45, I nevertheless acknowledge my indebtedness to and esteem for Professors Rosenstein and Brownlee by dedicating this commentary to them.

- 1 All quotations from the *Commedia* are from the text established by Giorgio Petrocchi as found in the edition and translation of Charles S. Singleton. In my article any quoted translations of the *Commedia* are also by Singleton.
- 2 Guido Di Pino, for example, speaks of the "persistenza delle fonti ovidiane le quali, a partire dai canti del paradiso terrestre, si sono sostituite di fatto a quelle virgiliane" (174). A convenient bibliography on Dante and Ovid is located at the end of Ettore Paratore's entry on "Ovidio" in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, to which I would add the recent work of two Dartmouth Dante Institute colleagues: Kevin Brownlee, "Ovid's Semele and Dante's Metamorphosis: *Paradiso* 21–23," and Peter S. Hawkins, "Transfiguring the Text: Ovid, Scripture and the Dynamics of Allusion" and "Dante's Ovid."
- 3 See Singleton, *Inferno* 2: *Commentary* 432: "Dante's monster differs in two striking respects from that of Virgil and Ovid. . . . Dante most likely borrowed other details of his description from Virgil (see *Aen.* 8.193–99). . . . With regard to the mode of Cacus's death, Dante apparently followed not Virgil but Livy. . . ."
- 4 Perhaps the most extended of the literal interpretations is that of Domenico Palmieri, S.I., who says that Dante's action is a "gesto per indicar che si stia zitto: il solo gesto porta con sè l'impronta di comando che però non suol farsi dall'inferiore al superiore, seppure non s'accompagna con qualche tratto del viso, che somigli a preghiera" (444).
- 5 But see note 9 below.
- 6 Ovid, *Metamorphoses with an English Translation by Frank Justus Miller* 2: 52. The verse quoted agrees in all its particulars with that of the more authoritative edition, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Metamorphoses*, ed. W. S. Anderson.
- 7 Dante did not know Catullus's poems, where references to Harpocrates are charged with eroticism and where the god's finger is assumed to be in the mouth rather than on the lips. Certainly Alciati's Harpocrates-like emblem of scholarly reflection (see illustration) also suggests that the finger may be at least partially in the mouth. Dante the Pilgrim, in contrast, places his finger from chin to nose and, therefore, on his lips.
- 8 In *Enciclopedia dantesca* 4:12, Graziano states that "Il termine [*naso*] ricorre solo nell'*Inferno* e nel *Purgatorio* (una volta nel *Detto*). . . . È sempre in senso proprio." The absence of the word *naso* in *Paradiso* stimulates speculation on the role of this word in Dante's poem. I believe *naso*'s disappearance from the last canticle's vocabulary possibly parallels the non-presentation of St. Paul in the same canticle. If there is no St. Paul because Dante the Pilgrim/Poet at the end of the poem symbolizes a new St. Paul (one who has shared in the Pauline *raptus* and described what the first Paul would not or could not), then perhaps the word *naso* must necessarily be absent from the poetics of the *Paradiso* as well. Why? I can only respond with a conjecture. The

Dante whose nose is pointed to in *Inferno* 25.45 and the Dante who addresses the reader immediately thereafter become one as the *Commedia* concludes, and that unified Dante's portrayal of *trasumanar* supplants completely the Christian poet's need for any direct reference to the original (and now unquestionably transfigured and surpassed) classical model of metamorphosing poetry: Publius Ovidius Naso. Instead the name will appear only in the highly veiled formula of "io vidi" in *Paradiso*, and even then it will recall with equal force the Vulgate "vidi" of the Apocalypse.

- 9 See, for example, A. Momigliano, on *Inferno* 25.45: "verso che dà l'aria della scena e nel medesimo tempo impone silenzio al lettore e fissa già la sua stupefatta attenzione su quello che seguirà" (188–89, emphasis added). Cf. Pasquini-Quaglio, in the concluding, more extensive comment on the entire canto: "L'improvviso, ma non gratuito, stacco narrativo, nel silenzio intenso, stupito e ammirato dei pellegrini, voluto anzi dal vivo (v. 45), cade sotto le forme di un appello diretto al lettore (vv. 46–48), suona come un campanello d'allarme, squilla come richiamo d'attenzione ad un incredibile spettacolo" (301–02).
- 10 Ghisalberti writes, "As to the cognomen *Naso*, not every one agreed in believing it to be an allusion to a physical characteristic and one particularly suited to the poet on account of the moral sagacity which enabled him to smell out the difference between virtue and vice" (27–8). I am indebted to Professor Peter S. Hawkins of the Yale Divinity School for first drawing my attention to Ghisalberti's study and for offering suggestions as to how to improve my own article.
- 11 For a favorable assessment of Shoaf's somewhat revisionist study, see my "Chaucer and the Three Crowns of Florence (Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio): Recent Comparative Scholarship."
- 12 See Hollander's entire discussion of *verga* in Ovid, Statius, and Virgil on pp. 176–84, as well as Dante's other uses of *verga* in *Purgatorio* 14.102 and 27.80. I here should like to express my appreciation to Professor Hollander for his lectures at the 1985 DDI and for his having read and critiqued an earlier draft of my work.
- 13 See S. Gregory the Great, vol. 3, pt. 2, bk. 31, sec. 44, on the Song of Solomon 7:4, "Thy nose is as the tower, which is in Libanus": "We distinguish also by the nose between odours and foul smells. And what is designated by the nose, but the farseeing discernment of the saints?" See also vol. 2, pt. 3, bk. 15, sect. 37, on Job 21:5, "And lay your finger upon your mouth": "seeing that by our fingers we distinguish things severally, discretion is not unfitly represented by the fingers. . . . And so the finger is laid to the mouth, when the tongue is bridled by discretion, that by what it utters, it may not fall into the sin of foolishness."
- 14 One commentator has even proffered a possible connection between Dante's gesture to the nose and another Valley of the Princes event. Giacomo Poletto suggests that "questo luogo [*Inf.* 25.45] fa, in parte, rammentar l'altro

dell'Anima nella valletta de' Principi (*Purg.* 8.9), *che l'ascoltar chiedea con mano*" (emphasis in the original). Most commentators, however, would likely see a biblical, rather than classical, source in the purgatorial passage cited by Poletto—to wit, Acts 13.16, where St. Paul motions with his hand for silence. (See, for example, Singleton's gloss, *Purgatorio 2: Commentary* 160.)

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## **Juno among the Counterfeiters: Tragedy vs. Comedy in Dante's *Inferno* 30**

Canto 30 of the *Inferno* begins with an unusually extended simile, the longest in the *Commedia*:

Nel tempo che Iunone era crucciata  
per Semelè contra 'l sangue tebano,  
come mostrò una e altra fiata,  
Atamante divenne tanto insano,  
che veggendo la moglie con due figli  
andar carcata da ciascuna mano,  
gridò: "Tendiam le reti, sì ch'io pigli  
la leonessa e' leoncini al varco";  
e poi distese i dispietati artigli,  
prendendo l'un ch'avea nome Learco,  
e rotollo e percosselo ad un sasso;  
e quella s'annegò con l'altro carco.  
E quando la fortuna volse in basso  
l'altezza de' Troian che tutto ardiva,  
sì che 'nsieme col regno il re fu casso,  
Ecuba trista, misera e cattiva,  
poscia che vide Polissena morta,  
e del suo Polidoro in su la riva  
del mar si fu la dolorosa accorta,  
forsennata latrò sì come cane;  
tanto il dolor le fé la mente torta.  
Ma né di Tebe furie né troiane  
si vider mai in alcun tanto crude,  
non punger bestie, nonché membra umane,  
quant'io vidi in due ombre smorte e nude,  
che mordendo correvan di quel modo  
che 'l porco quando del porcil si schiude. (1-27)

Almost unanimously the commentaries record a puzzled reaction. Bosco points out the "scarsa rispondenza" between the figures of Atamante and Hecuba and those of Gianni Schicchi and Mirra compared

to pigs coming out of the sty: "Atamante, Ecuba e il porco coesistono malamente in una sola molecola fantastica" (425). Momigliano states: "Dal classico siamo piombati nel grottesco: tragicamente bello l'uno, plebeamente stupendo l'altro; ma non fusi l'uno con l'altro" (613). Emilio Bigi admits to an impression of "dissonanza" and "sproporzione" between the simile and the rushing in of the two falsifiers: "E ci si chiede perché mai Dante abbia voluto introdurre questa rapida e brutale descrizione mediante un così vistoso indugio su due episodî illustri di mitologica pazzia" (1064). Contini makes the point even more strongly: "Ma per chi tanto lusso di ricordi illustri, di regie sventure? . . . La cronaca nera e il gazzettino rosa, i pettegolezzi di farmacia, le diffamazioni municipali . . . sono fra gl'ingredienti capitali della vasta *contaminatio* di Dante" ("Sul XXX" 449).

Let us examine the few solutions offered to explain the presence of the simile. Sapegno believes that it expresses "la disposizione distaccata e curiosa del pellegrino" as he examines the contemptible sins of this bolgia. Bigi sees in it a "precisa funzione morale" since Dante states in each mythological scene the "colpa religiosa" and the ensuing "ineluttabile effettuarsi di una terribile punizione divina." The two myths would make explicit the presence of the "giudizio divino" in the torments of the counterfeiters (1067-68). In other words, the two sets of punishments—in the myths and in the tenth bolgia—would be the product of the same kind of divine justice at work and the Christian God would be equated with the vengeful Juno—an unacceptable hypothesis. Besides, if the simile had this "moral function," one wonders why Dante would feel the need to justify divine punishment only in the case of the falsifiers and not for any other of the damned souls.

It is difficult to perceive the necessary *tertium comparationis* between the two terms of the comparison. The protagonists of the mythological stories are undone by a vengeful goddess through no fault of their own; they bear no conceivable resemblance to the sinners to whom they are compared, either in terms of guilt or of the sin punished in this bolgia. Let us remember that the simile, though placed at the beginning of the canto, is inserted into the episode of the falsifiers which has started in the previous canto, and which then resumes in canto 30. The simile thus constitutes a break in the



plebeian and ribald atmosphere of the tenth bolgia, an odd interlude of royalty and tragedy in the middle of a mostly low-class group of petty sinners. In a way, it is the opposite of what Dante does in *Purgatorio* 6 where the *zara* simile introduces a jarring note of coarse venality after the dramatic stories of noble souls in *Purgatorio* 5. In either case the result is an imbalance of tone and a startling contrast of contents and style registers. What emerges clearly in canto 30 is a mismatching of expressive means, a promiscuous mixture of high and low tones, a lack of connection between the mythological *exempla* and the infernal reality. One of the most vulgar cantos of the poem is given one of the loftiest *exordia*.

Moreover, as Bosco observes in his commentary:

non si scorge la ragione dell'avere accomunato il re tebano e la regina troiana: nulla essi hanno di comune tra loro, se non la pazzia. Se questa fosse il denominatore comune, essa dovrebbe essere la malattia anche di Gianni e di Mirra . . . e invece il poeta parla più volte di rabbia. (425)

This is an important point: if there is no connection between the vehicle and the tenor of the simile, is there a common denominator at least between the two protagonists of the mythological stories?

Dante takes his material from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The Athamas episode is described in Book 4 (416–562), and Dante's reference to Juno's wrath against the Theban blood is indeed based on Ovid's descriptions of her irate jealousy of Semele. In the Hecuba episode (13.399–575), conversely, Ovid does not ascribe her fate to Juno's hatred. Accordingly, Dante does not mention Juno in the lines he devotes to Hecuba's sad plight.

It is, however, my contention that the common denominator between Athamas and Hecuba is indeed Juno's revenge. Dante, for reasons not immediately apparent, seems to have placed the whole episode of the falsifiers under the shadow of Juno's wrath. In the previous canto, when he sees the punishment of these sinners, he introduces a first simile on the same subject:

Non credo ch'a veder maggior tristizia  
 fosse in Egea il popol tutto infermo,  
 quando fu l'aere sì pien di malizia,  
 che li animali, infino al picciol vermo,  
 cascaron tutti, e poi le genti antiche,  
 secondo che i poeti hanno per fermo,

si ristorar di seme di formiche;  
 ch'era a veder per quella oscura valle  
 languir li spirti per diverse biche.

(*Inf.* 29.58–66)

In this case, as in that of Hecuba, Dante does not mention Juno as the cause of the catastrophe. Yet, in Ovid's version of the myth (7.523–660), King Aeacus says: "A dire pestilence came on my people through angry Juno's wrath, who hated us for that our land was called by her rival's name."<sup>1</sup> Thus the fact that Dante does not refer to Juno in the Hecuba *exemplum* either, does not necessarily mean that he sees her fate as unconnected with Juno. Although Dante explicitly mentions Juno only in the first line of canto 30, he seems to have her wrath in mind in all three legends of Aegina, Thebes and Troy. If Ovid attributes to Juno's revenge only the undoing of Aegina and Athamas, we can find Juno's involvement in the Trojan tragedy elsewhere, specifically in Dante's principal and constant source: Virgil.

Dante, who knows the *Aeneid* "tutta quanta" (*Inf.* 20.114), must of course be aware of the fact that the Virgilian poem ascribes to Juno's intervention not only the obstacles facing Aeneas throughout, but also the fall of Troy. From the very beginning of his epic, Virgil bemoans the enmity of Juno: "cruel Juno's unforgiving wrath."<sup>2</sup> After asking the Muse to tell him the cause for which the "regina deum" could drive a man remarkable for his "pietas" to so many perils, he wonders: "Can resentment so fierce dwell in heavenly breasts?"<sup>3</sup> And more explicitly he explains further down:

The daughter of Saturn . . . mindful of the old war which erstwhile she had fought at Troy for her beloved Argos—not yet had the cause of her wrath and her bitter sorrows faded from her mind: deep in her heart lie stored the judgment of Paris and her slighted beauty's wrong, her hatred of the race and the honors paid to ravished Ganymede . . . (*Aen.* 1.23–28)<sup>4</sup>

These and other examples, too numerous to quote, clearly show Virgil's choice of the root of all the ills that had befallen Troy and that will afflict Aeneas: Juno's undying wrath and burning desire for revenge. As R. W. Johnson observes (14), Juno's anger is close to being the central theme of the *Aeneid*. It underlies the whole story of Aeneas and recurs insistently until the end of the poem, conferring upon it a dark shadow of cruelty.

Dante's digression in *Inferno* 30, with the account of the dire effects of Juno's vindictiveness, as well as his reference in the *Vita Nuova* to Juno as "una dea nemica de li Troiani" (25.9), may suggest that he shared the *Aeneid*'s concern with the theme of Juno's wrath. Like Virgil before him, Dante too seems to have been struck by the irrational and all-encompassing hatred of Juno, not just towards her direct rivals for Jupiter's love, but also towards all of their immediate families, descendants, or even their whole races. She exterminates the entire population of Aegina, just as she destroys Semele's sister and kin and conspires to bring about the fall of Troy and thus the annihilation of Paris's family.

Juno may represent, in Dante's eyes, the essence of the pagan conception of divine power, arbitrarily exercised to evil and unjust ends. It is therefore unreasonable to believe, as some critics do, that Dante could equate the punishing justice of the Christian God with the atrocities of Juno indiscriminately sowing destruction on her path to revenge. If anything, Dante is showing how antithetical to the true God's justice is the pagan vengeance inflicted upon those who essentially are innocent victims. Let us remember that, when entering the tenth bolgia Dante says:

e allor fu la mia vista più viva  
giù ver' lo fondo, là 've la ministra  
de l'alto Sire infallibil giustizia  
punisce i falsador che qui registra.

(*Inf.* 29.54–57)

It would be surprising indeed if Dante deemed necessary to call on Juno's help to show the fairness of what he himself defines as the *infallibil giustizia* of *l'alto Sire*.

Of course, if we reject that hypothesis, we still are left with the problem: what is the purpose of the simile in *Inferno* 30? The other explanations—ironic detachment, display of erudition—are as easy as they are implausible. Undoubtedly, an imitation of Ovid and, in my opinion, Virgil seems to be a reasonable justification for the simile. Dante at times admits to his own desire of emulating his illustrious predecessors, as he does for example in *Inferno* 25.94–99. But this could only be the beginning of an explanation.

Bigi sees the simile elaborated with an explicit rhetorical effort, even if "not always poetically valid."<sup>5</sup> In my opinion, Contini seems

to be more to the point when he speaks of the "andatura prosaica dell'elocuzione" (448). If we place side by side this simile with the extended comparison we find in *Inferno* 24.1–21, we can but notice the striking difference between the two passages with respect to their rhetorical devices. The first six lines of the *villanello* simile are laden with circumlocutions, personifications, metaphors, literary allusions and conceits. There is nothing comparable in *Inferno* 30.1–27. Here the language is simple, even pedestrian, as in line 10 ("prendendo l'un ch'avea nome Learco"), not too elegant, as in line 15 ("il re fu casso"). Besides the few elements noted by Bigi, I would only add the presence of a few alliterations, most notably in line 9: "distese i dispietati artigli." But there are no rhetorical figures as in the first segment of the *villanello* simile or even in the general language of the *Commedia*.

Dante would seem to have deliberately refrained from giving an ornate *vesta* to this trope, establishing an almost peculiar contrast between the high tone of the content and the "prosaic" style of the elocution. But why? If what Dante is doing is setting himself in competition with Ovid and Virgil, he may be suggesting that he is able to use their same lofty material in a plain, unadorned language. That there is a certain polemical intent in his citation of classical sources may perhaps be manifest in the first "Juno" simile (*Inf.* 29.58–66). When he relates that the exterminated population of Aegina was restored "di seme di formiche," he interjects the line: "secondo che i poeti hanno per fermo" (63). That "per fermo" undeniably sounds sarcastic since it precedes the unlikely dénouement of a human generation from the seed of ants.<sup>6</sup> But is Dante just trying to make a not too novel point about the untruthfulness of the classical poets? Moreover, the two other examples concerning Athamas and Hecuba are not vitiated by the same character of improbability.

Considered by itself, of course, the simile of canto 30 presents no interpretive difficulty. It is the context that makes it appear wrong and puzzling. The downfall of Theban and Trojan royal houses is evoked to set off what Bosco appropriately calls "peccati da commedia" (425). Perhaps it is in this remark that we can find a solution to the problem.

I have already argued elsewhere that Dante is concerned with establishing a contrast between Virgil's *alta tragedia* and his own

*comedia*.<sup>7</sup> Virgil had used the theme of Juno's wrath to introduce and develop his epic poem, from the fall of Troy to the violent battles of Italy. Tales about tragedies of cataclysmic proportions, mournful individual deaths, the destiny of a race, the future of Rome and of the world, are the subjects of the *Aeneid* through which the vindictive anger of the goddess is interwoven. Dante selects the same starting point of Juno's resentment to tell us about two infuriated "ombre" running in the fashion of the "porco quando del porcil si schiude." What originates *alta tragedia* in Virgil gives way to low comedy in Dante.

What may also strike us as unusual is the identity of these souls thus paired: one is Mirra, a character from classical antiquity, who had pretended to be someone else in order to lie incestuously with her father. The other *ombra* is Gianni Schicchi, a man from modern times. His sin of impersonation to draw a fake will and thus gain a mule for himself can only elicit an amused reaction. He is more of a joker, a trickster, than an evil sinner. By having him defined as a "folletto," Dante signals the playful and mischievous character of the Florentine falsifier. It is hard to take him seriously. There is surely no madness in him or in his rather modest greed. His farcical story of course clashes with the darkness of desperate and unnatural love surrounding "l'anima antica / di Mirra scellerata," where even the words used to describe the soul confer on her an aura of tragic dignity in evil. What Dante takes away when he assimilates her to a hog let out of the sty and therefore, as Singleton indicates (549), running on all fours, he gives back in the lines identifying her. But, by pairing her with Gianni Schicchi, he reinforces her debasement. Tragedy racing along with comedy on hands and feet can hardly preserve its original loftiness. What Dante has done at the beginning of the canto, comparing Athamas and Hecuba to the two "ombre smorte e nude" moving in a hog-like fashion, he continues doing in the subdivision of these same two spirits. Again he places high and low side by side and, in the contamination, comedy wins over and blankets out any possible effect of awe and terror.

A different kind of contrast is established for the central character of the canto. Master Adam appears as a grotesque figure. Yet, the language used to introduce the new soul is solemn in signaling the beginning of a new episode: "Io vidi un . . ." (49). The

deformities caused by his dropsy are horrifying. Yet, the description is formulated by means of rare and difficult expressions and rhymes in a juxtaposition of the refined (*a guisa di lèuto, dispaia, rinverte*) and the vulgar (*anguinaia, forcuto, ventraia*).

Master Adam's speech, with a single exception, is couched in an elevated language:

"O voi che sanz'alcuna pena siete,  
e non so io perché, nel mondo gramo,"  
diss'elli a noi, "guardate e attendete  
a la miseria del maestro Adamo; . . ."

(*Inf.* 30.58-61)

As generally noted, these words echo Jeremiah's Lamentations: "O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte / si est dolor sicut dolor meus" (1.12). In a sonnet of the *Vita Nuova* Dante had already paraphrased the same passage: "O voi che per la via d'Amor passate, / attendete e guardate / s'elli è dolor alcun, quanto 'l mio, grave" (7.3). It is important to remember that the sorrow Dante refers to on that occasion is only a pretense: the lady Dante had adopted as a *schermo* to hide his true love for Beatrice had left Florence and, afraid that his ruse would be unmasked if he displayed no sadness, he wrote that sonnet. To feign grief, Dante thus resorted to the hyperbole of Jeremiah's Lamentations, as though only an exaggerated display of despair could lend credibility to his false complaint. In *Inferno* 28 Bertran de Born addresses Dante by resorting also to Jeremiah:

. . . "Or vedi la pena molesta,  
tu che, spirando, vai veggendo i morti:  
vedi s'alcuna è grande come questa . . ."

(*Inf.* 28.130-32)

Bertran paraphrases only the last part of the Biblical passage ("videte / si est dolor sicut dolor meus") while Master Adam only the first part: "O vos omnes qui . . . , attendite et videte . . . ." It would almost seem as though the speeches of Bertran and Master Adam complemented each other. But are they meant to be a sincere expression of sorrow or is their going back to so noble a source as a Lamentation of Jeremiah rhetorical affectation and hence a signal that their suffering is not to be taken too much at heart, as Dante's own was not in that episode of the *Vita Nuova*?

The Biblical references continue in the next lines: "io ebbi, vivo, assai di quel ch'i' volli, / e ora, lasso!, un gocciol d'acqua bramo" (62-63). It is now Luke's parable about the rich man and the poor Lazarus that is evoked (16.23-24). The wealth of citations from classical and Biblical sources increases the contrast with the venal milieu of petty falsifiers and counterfeiters.

Master Adam's speech then shifts to a lyrical tone:

Li ruscelletti che d'i verdi colli  
 del Casentin discendon giuso in Arno,  
 facendo i lor canali freddi e molli,  
 sempre mi stanno innanzi, e non indarno,  
 ché l'immagine lor vie più m'asciuga  
 che 'l male ond'io nel volto mi discarno.  
 La rigida giustizia che mi fruga  
 tragge cagion del loco ov'io peccai  
 a metter più li miei sospiri in fuga.

(*Inf.* 30.64-72)

The rhetorical virtuosity continues, now with a bow to Virgil. As noted by Singleton (555) among others, the "canali freddi e molli" is an erudite allusion to *Eclogues* 10.42: "Hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata." It is somehow incongruous that this ludicrous figure should address his desperate desire for water in such poetic and delicate words, while recognizing at the same time the justness of divine punishment.<sup>8</sup>

The last part of Master Adam's speech centers on his violent hatred for the counts Guidi of Romena, Guido, Alessandro and Aghinolfo, who had instigated him to counterfeit the gold florin of Florence. To have his revenge by seeing them in Hell too, he would give up a whole fountain. While the counterfeiter's vengeful rage has something awesome about it, we may question Dante's choice of the episode because of the thoroughly negative light it projects on a family whose hospitality he had benefited from. Besides, Alessandro and Aghinolfo had fought in 1303 and 1304 (Aghinolfo also in 1305, Alessandro having died probably in 1304) against Florence on behalf of the White exiles, among whom was Dante himself. One or the other of the two brothers had even been the leader of the rebel troops. Later, Aghinolfo had been a faithful supporter of Henry VII's expedition in Italy between 1310 and 1313, and he had been among the first Italian lords to pledge loyalty to the emperor. Dante met

Aghinolfo in Pisa in the spring of 1312 at the court of Henry VII.<sup>9</sup> Sapegno explains away this negative judgment in *Inferno* 30 merely as proof that Dante's superior moral stance *sub specie aeternitatis* overrides earthly allegiances (444). It might however also be possible that Dante is signaling to us a more profound change in his views both with regard to the initial enterprise of the White exiles against Florence—what after all was civil war brought by them and by himself against his own city—and with regard to the failed enterprise of the emperor, another war on Florence advocated and wished for by him at the time.<sup>10</sup>

It is in any case hard to be sure of Dante's intentions as he does not reveal any personal feelings when hearing Master Adam's outburst against the Conti Guidi. But it is also important to note that Dante does not show either any irritation when the counterfeiter, at the beginning of his speech, rather unpleasantly, says: "O voi che sanz'alcuna pena siete, / e non so io perché, nel mondo gramo" (58–59). That "non so io perché" is rather insulting. Let us remember that, on a previous occasion, a much more harmless question had elicited an irate riposte from Dante. In *Inferno* 8.33, Filippo Argenti asks Dante: "Chi se' tu che vieni anzi ora?" Whether Dante interpreted the question as a slight or was just being infected with the sin of the wrathful, he responds with angry and contemptuous words. But when Master Adam interjects his spiteful remark in the only rhetorical lapse of his address, Dante does not react. At the end of the soul's speech, Dante merely asks about the two other damned lying close by.

Here we have another striking juxtaposition. Potiphar's wife, she who had falsely accused Joseph of attempted seduction, is seemingly given the role of representing the world of the Bible in this continuing contamination.<sup>11</sup> The "falso Sinon greco di Troia" in turn represents classical culture, in an apparent return of the text to the milieu dominating the beginning of the canto. But, at the same time, how debased that culture appears when we see it embodied by Sinon, not so much for what he represents—the quintessential treacherous liar—as for how he now behaves in Hell. While Potiphar's wife remains dignifiedly silent throughout the episode, Sinon engages in an active interchange with Master Adam.

What is extraordinary is that Dante uses this Virgilian creature



for one of the most heated and coarse quarrels of the *Commedia*. The two men exchange insults and physical blows as though they were fishmongers in the market place. Forgotten is Master Adam's elegant and refined tone. Even more forgotten is the highly eloquent and vibrantly rhetorical style of Sinon's speech in the *Aeneid* (2.69–194) by which he ensnared the Trojans. Here in Hell Sinon finally is truthful, as the counterfeiter remarks: “Tu di’ ver di questo; / ma tu non fosti sì ver testimonio / là ’ve del ver fosti a Troia richiesto” (112–114). But this truth is now banal and it comes at the cost of the high register he had used in the Latin poem. Through Sinon, Dante places the world of Virgil in direct clash with the small Tuscan world of the counterfeiter and from this contact the Virgilian creature emerges withered.

In order to see the scene in its proper perspective, it may not be superfluous to go over the key role played by Sinon in the fall of Troy. What Sinon achieved is what makes this episode in *Inferno* 30 so striking and maybe more deserving of our attention than it has so far received. Without Sinon, Ulysses' ingenious ploy of the wooden horse could not have been carried out and Troy would not have been conquered. Sinon was the indispensable link between Ulysses' brilliant conception and its materialization. The whole plan depended on Sinon's eloquence in persuading the Trojans to take the horse into the city. Thus Sinon was no common liar. On his ability to speak lies in the semblance of truth hinged the final issue of the 10-year war and the whole fate of Greece and Troy. Yet, Dante takes this accomplished master of rhetoric and has him humiliated and reduced to silence by a relatively ordinary and little known falsifier of coins in modern Tuscany.

It is true though that, as remarked by Bigi among others (1082–84), the altercation, vulgar as it may be, is still replete with learned and skilful touches of verbal virtuosity: antitheses (“membra . . . gravi, braccio . . . sciolto,” 107–08), chiasmic constructions (“Quando tu andavi . . . non l’avei . . . , più l’avei quando coniaivi,” 109–11; “la bocca tua per tuo mal . . . , 125), repetitions, *annominations*, circumlocutions (as the famous “specchio di Narcisso”). Oddly perhaps, there is a much greater deployment of rhetorical devices in this debate than in the presentation of the simile opening the canto. As noted by Momigliano (222), the quarrel alternates between the

two contenders, each being allotted one tercet in a rapid and prompt exchange of wits, until the "larga e vittoriosa conclusione di mastro Adamo," who in fact seemingly wins the contest by monopolizing two tercets at the end and thus having the last word.

It is at this point, while Dante is listening with fascinated attention, that Virgil harshly chides him: "Or pur mira, / che per poco che teco non mi risso!" (131-32). Dante is so upset by Virgil's rebuke that, mortified and embarrassed, he is unable to speak. Virgil, appeased by what he sees as Dante's contrition, quickly pardons him. He concludes his conciliatory speech, and the canto, praising, in Bigi's words, "la crisi purificatrice del discepolo" (1086), and sententiously warning him: "voler ciò udir è bassa voglia" (148). As a result, many critics have interpreted the whole scene as having been engineered by Dante to show his own repudiation of the comic-realistic genre in which he had indulged himself when exchanging the famous *tenzone* with Forese Donati. Dante would now feel ashamed of that genre and hence be in agreement with Virgil's condemnation of it.<sup>12</sup> Contini himself adopts such interpretation although noting amusedly the paradox that first Dante allows free rein to the "bassa voglia" by giving it full expression, and only thereafter yields to the control of his "coscienza morale-estetica" ("Sul XXX" 456).

More cautiously, Bosco notes that, after 1300, supposed date of the voyage to the afterworld, Dante was still engaged in the "comic-realistic subgenre" as testified by a *tenzone* with Cecco Angiolieri. And in the *Commedia* itself there is still to come Dante's squabble with Bocca degli Abati (*Inferno* 32.85-123). Bosco hence concludes that Dante considers comic poetry necessary in certain contexts while rejecting it, through Virgil, when it is practised for the sake of mere amusement. Virgil is prodding Dante to concentrate on his vocation, which would supposedly be that of "high" poetry (426-27).

I believe that Dante's message is more complex than what may appear on the surface. There might be here an underlying intent to assert the legitimacy of "comic-realistic" poetry and of the esthetics based on the intermingling of genres of which the whole *Commedia* itself is composed, alternating between high, middle and low tones. The polemical position implicit in the very title of the poem, setting it in direct contrast with the *alta tragedia* which is the *Aeneid*, seems to find one of its more clamorous restatements in *Inferno* 30. Far from

repudiating the "comic-realistic" genre of the *tenzone*, Dante gives it in this canto its most perfected realization, showing the richness of its possibilities, the wealth of rhetorical techniques inherent in its own nature of verbal contest. It is not the substance or contents which determine the quality of a piece of poetry, Dante seems to be suggesting. A tale of sublime tragedies, such as in the initial simile, if expressed in prosaic style does not possess much intrinsic beauty. Conversely, a vulgar brawl between two debased characters can be lifted to an artistic level thanks to the virtuosity of rhetorical devices and skills.

I am aware of the objection to my thesis suggested by Dante's reaction to Virgil's reprimand as described in lines 133-41. But I believe that there is perhaps here a certain mischievous play at work. To try to understand what is happening, we should remember the often made distinction between Dante as character in the poem and Dante as its author.<sup>13</sup> The character blushes, mortified by the rebuke, and sheepishly displays his desire to apologize, thus eliciting forgiveness from Virgil who, placated, generously comforts him.

But that this is not the whole story may be seen from a few hints provided in the scene. First of all, by his very words, Virgil reveals an uncharacteristic loss of control over himself, something that critics have generally neglected to note when praising Virgil's intervention. Only Bigi observes that Virgil's "*energica rampogna*" is still "*fortemente legata al tono e allo stile della scena precedente*" and that the phrase "*Or pur mira!*" is "*quasi popolaresco*" (1085). But, while aware of how the tone is atypical of the elegant poet, Bigi limits himself to discerning in this last section of the canto only a "*progressivo annobilitamento*" of its means of expression. He does not question the reasons or need for Virgil's temporary lapse from his customary dignity and propriety of language.

While it is not the first time that Virgil expresses disapproval of Dante (see for instance *Inferno* 7.70-72; 20.27-30), he displays here an unusually intense anger made evident by his threat of a "*rissa*" with Dante and even more by the slightly irregular syntax of the phrase ("*che per poco che teco*") and by the cacophonous sounds (*che co-che co*) in addition to the "r's" of "*Or pur mira.*" It is almost as though Virgil himself had been infected with the vulgarity of the scene and reacted accordingly, almost eager to enter himself into a

scuffle with Dante in imitation of the one between Master Adam and his own Sinon, and, in addition, forgetting his mastery of linguistic rules. The very choice of the verb *rissare*, from *fare rissa* (where *rissa* means brawl, with exchange of insults and blows) reveals a surprisingly excitable Virgil. To reproach Dante for listening to an altercation by adopting a similarly irate tone is, to say the least, illogical, and especially inappropriate for the "savio duca."

One wonders how the scene could have developed had Dante answered back in a similar tone. Fortunately, he holds his peace. But we can detect a sense of pained surprise in Dante's wording of line 133, "Quand'io 'l senti' a me parlar con ira," as though he really had not expected that Virgil should speak to *him* in anger. Besides, it is interesting that, in describing his own subsequent state, Dante resorts to the same wealth of *annominations* that had characterized the exchange between Master Adam and Sinon and, earlier, Griffolino's speech (lines 39, 41, 44 and 45):

Qual è colui che suo dannaggio *sogna*,  
 che *sognando* desidera *sognare*,  
 sì che quel ch'è, come non fosse, agogna,  
 tal mi fec'io, non possendo parlare,  
 che disiava *scusarmi*, e *scusava*  
 me tuttavia, e nol mi credea fare.

(Inf. 30.136-41)

Dante, therefore, even after his master's reproach, is still resorting to the style of the damned souls, but only with respect to its precious literary aspect and not to its quarrelsome and plebeian tone which is instead adopted by Virgil when he gives vent to his wrath.

If we accept the premise that Dante really aims at defending the genre censured by Virgil, we may then see falling into place the heterogeneous and mutually contradictory pieces of the puzzle that this canto is, and we can see it form a comprehensible and logical whole. The insistent succession of jarringly contrasting juxtapositions of highs and lows, of tragedy and comedy, of classical characters and farcical pranksters, of an impersonator for love and a falsifier for a mule, of a prevaricator causing the fall of a kingdom and a counterfeiter of greed, of elegant allusions to Biblical or literary texts and tavern-like scuffles: all of this mingling is indeed difficult to explain if we take Virgil's condemnation of the *tenzone*

as Dante's own. But the *contaminatio* can find its justification once we recognize the struggle Dante is pursuing in the defence of his unprecedented attempt to create a poetry which follows none of the classical canons of stylistic hierarchies, of taste and decorum, of the rigid limits restricting what is permissible within a particular mode and what is not. Dante seems to be rejecting here once and for all the strictures of a consistently high tone in favour of the freedom to let low comedy infiltrate the text and to interweave a multiplicity of levels in an enriching dialectic of styles.

Dante's polemic is probably addressed in general to an educated audience. Within the text itself, however, it is primarily and unavoidably directed against Virgil as the representative par excellence of *alta tragedia* and, hence, as the natural adversary and authoritative antagonist of the product he is witnessing at first-hand, the foremost obstacle that Dante has to surmount in his novel enterprise. In a way, Dante is directly confronting Virgil both by exposing him to this dizzying interchange of styles and, even more, by using one of Virgil's own creatures to be the interlocutor of a *tenzone* with a near-contemporary of Dante from Dante's own territory. No wonder that Virgil is perturbed and angered. When Dante had entered into a squabble with Filippo Argenti in *Inferno* 8, Virgil, far from rebuking his protégé, had lavished praise on him; and in the next debate, between Dante and Bocca degli Abati (*Inferno* 32), he abstains from any comment. His position seems to be that these are just matters among men of Dante's own time and place, of no interest to him. His leniency in these cases seems to imply a certain contempt for or lack of concern with what may seem to him to be the vulgarity of Dante's milieu.<sup>14</sup> But the situation changes when what is at stake is Virgil's own world, contaminated by the clash with the shabby underworld of modern Tuscany. In Virgil's presence, the supremely clever Sinon who, by the sheer power of his brilliant eloquence, had singlehandedly made possible the defeat of otherwise unconquerable Troy, is brought down in turn as the Greek engages in a coarse scuffle and is outwitted by a petty falsifier of coins. Let us also remember that Virgil had probably noticed Master Adam's impertinent allusion to the *Aeneid* when he says to Sinon: "e sieti reo che tutto il mondo sallo!" (120). It is not flattering for Virgil to see his poem cited by a common criminal. Virgil, thus challenged in his own creation, reacts

angrily to that debasement and to the whole enterprise of Dante's tinkering with literature, language and style. Virgil's real motivation may be shown also by the fact that, in this case, he angrily intervenes when Dante is only passively watching a squabble, while he does not disapprove in the two other cases mentioned above where Dante actually is an active participant in the quarrels.

Virgil would seem to achieve a quick and easy victory over the humbled disciple as he harshly rebukes him. The very fact that Dante the author allows his alter ego in the poem to be so promptly overpowered and put to shame may testify to Dante's acknowledgement of the controversial character of his own experimentations and his uncertainty about the kind of welcome that would be reserved by most critics to the stylistic "promiscuity" of his poem. Even if the literary exchange with Giovanni del Virgilio is to come much later, Dante may already be aware of the hostility he would encounter in the cultured community.<sup>15</sup> The first thing Dante must do in order to succeed in his literary enterprise is to strive to liberate himself from the tutelage of Virgil and of the classical examples. Perhaps the whole difficult relationship between Dante and Virgil throughout the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* may stem, to some extent, from this very struggle.

We should remember that Dante himself has shown his concern with the problem of style in his writings, in particular in the *De vulgari Eloquentia* 2.4. As P. V. Mengaldo notes in the Introduction to his edition of *DvE* (xxxvi-l), Dante's rhetorical culture derives mostly from the *artes dictamini* and the *poetriae* of the 12th and 13th centuries.<sup>16</sup> These treatises in turn depend to a large extent on classical works such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De Inventione* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*. Dante knew these works and we can thus presume that he was influenced by them directly as well as through the medieval rhetoricians.

Geoffroi de Vinsauf states that the three styles, *grandiloquus*, *mediocris* and *humilis*, depend on the persons and things being written about (*Documentum* 3.145). John of Garland, tying the styles to the *status hominum*, elaborates the famous *Rota Vergilii* where Virgil's three chief works become the models for the three kinds: the *Bucolics* for the *stylus humilis*, the *Georgics* for the *mediocris* and the *Aeneid* for the *gravis*. Style becomes connected with social

dignity and social class. As Faral notes, "c'est la qualité des personnes, et non plus celle de la locution, qui fournit le principe de la classification" (88). This of course represents a change by comparison with the Ciceronian doctrines as formulated, for instance, in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4.8), where the three styles are exclusively defined by the choice of words used and by the presence or lack of ornaments. But, aside from the addition of a social dimension, the medieval classifications conform to the classical rules in prescribing a definite hierarchy of terms in the vocabulary adopted and a hierarchy of rhetorical figures divided between the *ornatus difficilis* and the *ornatus facilis*, to be applied according to the style aimed at. Without going into the details that would take us too far from the subject, let us only note that metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, antithesis and periphrasis belong to the *ornatus difficilis* which of course characterizes the *modus gravis*. Conversely, the *ornatus facilis*, suitable for the two other styles, includes figures of speech such as the *annominatio* and figures of thought such as the simile. What is intriguing for our present subject is that, according to the medieval treatises, both the *annominatio* and the simile are to be shunned or, at least, used only very sparingly.

As is pointed out by Mengaldo,<sup>17</sup> Dante, in his *De vulgari Eloquentia* 2.4.5–7, follows in theory the medieval tripartition of styles. But in practice, when discussing stylistic levels, Dante concentrates on the binary opposition between *tragoedia* and *comoedia* (*E. D.* 5: 437a), the first requiring a "superior" style or the *illustris* vernacular, the latter an "inferior" style which can fluctuate between the "mediocre" or "humble" ("quandoque mediocre, quandoque humile vulgare sumatur" 2.4.6). Mengaldo observes that "ciò che caratterizza maggiormente la posizione dantesca è precisamente il fatto che da questa fluttuazione sia esclusa proprio, a differenza che nella tradizione oraziana ortodossa, la tragedia, così isolata nella propria altezza" (437b). In his unfinished treatise, Dante indicates only the elements that should characterize the "tragic" style: "gravitas sententiarum," metric structure, "constructionis elatio et excellentia vocabulorum" (2.4.7). But in the Letter to Cangrande a case is made for a stylistic flexibility when Horace's *Ars poetica* 93–96 is quoted as allowing the authors of comedies to express themselves like the authors of tragedies and viceversa.<sup>18</sup> It may be interesting to note that

this passage has been cited by some critics as invalidating Dante's authorship of the Letter to Cangrande, since it contradicts the definition of the two styles (*elate et sublime* for the tragedy and *remisse et humiliter* for the comedy) given just before the reference to Horace. I would argue that on the contrary the citation of Horace would be in accord with the stylistic pluralism of the *Commedia*.

Particularly important in Dante's treatise on language is the notion of *convenientia*, that is, the relationship of suitability or congruence between style and subject (*materia: res* and *persona*). In other words the stylistic register must be appropriate to the persons and things dealt with. And to each of the styles there must be a correspondence of lexical choices.

This *convenientia* is exactly what we may notice as lacking in *Inferno* 30. To recapitulate, the initial simile, though it deals with persons and things of the loftiest kind, is worded in a simple mode which we may define as *mediocris*. The stylistic level then precipitously slides into the low both in content and in lexical choice, despite the fact that one of the two characters involved is Mirra, a tragic figure in her own right. The tone somehow goes up illogically for the humble figure of Griffolino who uses elegant terms and figures such as periphrases and *annominationes*. And when Master Adam speaks, an analogous inversion takes place as this petty counterfeiter is given a speech lofty both in lexicon and in rhetorical adornments. And while the altercation between Master Adam and Sinon is vulgar in tone and words, it is full of figures of speech such as the already mentioned antitheses, chiasmic constructions, repetitions, periphrases and *annominationes*.

If we examine all these various sections of the canto, we may note that Dante departs here both from the medieval prescriptions about the accord between style and *materia* and from the classical rules concerning *elocutio*, that is the choice of vocabulary and rhetorical figures which should agree among themselves and with the stylistic level adopted. Dante mixes it all, using in the mouth of the same characters the high and the low lexicon, the *ornatus facilis* and the *ornatus difficilis*. He ignores the *convenientia*, he is apparently indifferent to any sense of consistency and to what is appropriate for a character or for the circumstances. If any canto should be chosen to embody the message Dante wanted to convey when he gave his



poem the title of *comedia*, as well as the pluralism of styles he meant to adopt, this is canto 30 of the *Inferno*.

It has often been noted that cantos bearing the same number in the three canticas tend to have some kind of mutual correspondences, a development of similar themes, or a recurrence of analogous events. The similarities between cantos 30 in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* are indisputable: in *Purgatorio* 30 Virgil disappears and Beatrice appears. In *Paradiso* 30 Beatrice makes her last appearance as Dante's guide, to be followed by St. Bernard. If we can see these events as making some sort of rite of passage—from the tutelage of Virgil to that of Beatrice, from the guidance of Beatrice to that of St. Bernard, higher and higher on the ladder of spiritual progress and enlightenment—is there anything similar in *Inferno* 30 to show a relationship with these other two cantos?

I believe that the rite of passage taking place in *Inferno* 30 has to do with Dante's emancipation from Virgil in the matter of style and language. He achieves independence on the strength of his newly claimed role as a Christian poet writing a truthful poem. We have already seen that in *Inferno* 29.58–64, when citing the regeneration of the population of Aegina from the seed of ants, Dante slyly interjects: “secondo che i poeti hanno per fermo.” This assertion stands out as a deliberate, if implicit, denunciation of the blatant mendacity of the pagan poets who may be seen as analogous to the falsifiers encountered now by the two wayfarers. And, just before the reference to Ovid's myth, Dante, describing the tenth *bolgia*, specifies:

. . . là 've la ministra  
de l'alto Sire infallibil giustizia  
punisce i falsador che *qui* registra.

(*Inf.* 29. 55–57)

Hollander convincingly makes the point that the “here” referred to in line 57 is the text of the *Commedia* itself, which therefore is not a common poem which could be just as false as any other product of a poet, but is “uniquely veracious” since divine justice herself registers in it the damned she punishes: “Justice, as God's minister, takes her place as the *dittator* of what will be recorded in the text by the agency of Dante's pen.” Dante would thus be pitting himself as the *scriba Dei* or *scriba Iustitiae* against the “pagan fabulators.” Hollander also points out that this passage “constitutes perhaps [Dante's] first

drawing back of the veil which conceals his identity as poet inspired by the Holy Spirit" ("Book of the Dead" 43–44).

Having thus made in canto 29 his first claim for the veracity of his poem, instrument of God's justice, Dante sets himself at the opposite pole of the pagan poets with their misleading poems and their "dei falsi e bugiardi." From this new exalted position, Dante proceeds in canto 30 to reject the literary authority of the classical poets and the lessons of their examples. He subverts the classification of styles, the sense of decorum and restraint, the appropriateness of what should be said by whom and how. He lays claim for full freedom of style, of language and of the uses of rhetoric for the new Christian poem.<sup>19</sup> He freely borrows materials from Ovid and from Virgil, and adapting them for his own purposes, he undermines the meanings or imports they had in the original works. While Dante the character may temporarily be shamed into submission by the scolding master, in effect the Christian poet is revolting against Virgil as he had not hitherto dared to do. The text of canto 30 remains before us, displaying the full scope of its subversive enterprise, regardless of Virgil's rebuke.

It is also important to note that the scene closing canto 30 apparently leaves an aftermath of bitterness in Dante: at the beginning of canto 31, he compares Virgil's tongue—first biting him ("mi morse") in the rebuke and then offering a *medicina*—to Achilles' spear which wounded and then healed its cut (1–6). It is a rather strong image which shows how deeply hurt Dante felt. Moreover, that Virgil's conciliatory words have not really closed Dante's wound is demonstrated by the ensuing silence between the two travelers: they proceed "sanza alcun sermone" (9). Virgil would appear to sense that he is at fault because he does what he had not done since *Inferno* 3.19, and 13.130, (and which he will not do again), namely, he takes Dante by the hand and does so in a much more affectionate manner than in the two previous occasions: "Poi *caramente* mi prese per mano" (28). In the two earlier cases, Virgil's gesture is a needed response to Dante's fears: the first time, in *Inferno* 3, Dante has just seen the inscription on the gate of hell and is obviously disheartened; the second time, in the wood of the suicides, he is so upset that he cannot speak to Pier delle Vigne (13.82–84) and his horror is increased by the pack of black bitches tearing to pieces the miserable

sinners. In canto 31 conversely, there is no fear displayed by Dante to prompt Virgil's act (only later, when he sees that what he believed to be towers are in fact giants, does Dante say "fuggiemi errore e crescemi paura," (39). It could be argued that Virgil takes Dante by the hand anticipating his fright. But it also is very probable that Virgil is tacitly trying to make up for his earlier burst of anger.

Additional support for the thesis that the ending of canto 30 was not meant to be a recantation may be found in the manifold ways in which Dante continues to violate the separation of styles and the *convenientia* or to question implicitly the ethics of Virgil's high style and rhetoric. I shall mention just a few examples: in canto 31 Virgil is seen addressing the classical character Antaeus with a speech which is rather surprising in the blatant deceitfulness of its flattery (115–29).<sup>20</sup> In canto 32 Dante claims the need for "rime aspre e chioce" to speak of the last circle, but modestly denies having them. Paradoxically he uses low words such as "abbo," "pigliare a gabbo," "mamma o babbo" (5–9), which he had proscribed in the *De vulgari Eloquentia* 2.7. Yet, while saying that this is not the language apt for describing the bottom of the universe, he does not resort to the lofty style that would be the logically necessary alternative. The canto is actually full of "harsh and grating" words in a low register, and it ends in a brawl between Dante himself and Bocca degli Abati.

Skipping now many other similar instances, let me just cite in conclusion two of the most flagrant cases of *inconvenientia*. In *Paradiso* 30, in the Empyrean, Beatrice's very last speech to Dante before disappearing from his side is a not too elegant expression of anger predicting death and damnation for two popes. Even more strikingly, in the previous canto, she uses some 60 verses to attack the philosophers and preachers in a tone alternating between the high and the "comic," going as far as to exclaim (with echoes of *Inf.* 30.27?): "Di questo ingrassa il porco sant'Antonio, / e altri assai che sono ancor più porci, / pagando di moneta senza conio" (*Par.* 29.124–26). At first sight, these are astonishingly inappropriate words in the mouth of the blessed woman and in the heaven where God is visible as a resplendent point surrounded by the angelic choirs. Many commentators agree with Tommaseo's observation that "il cenno dei porci non è cosa degna di Beatrice e del Paradiso."<sup>21</sup> But it certainly conforms with Dante's linguistic and stylistic objectives as implicitly

proclaimed in *Inferno* 30 and, I believe, is one more proof that Dante the author did not mean there to recant his "comic-realistic" style.

As many a time before and after *Inferno* 30, an apparently simple simile is used by Dante to make the reader pause and wonder at the reasons for its lack of correspondence to the context. Because of its incongruity, the simile calls attention to itself and to the whole canto. In a poem whose author demonstrably is in command of his means of expression, anything odd or inappropriate is probably meant to make some important point. In this case, what Dante aims at is, I believe, the justification for the very title of his poem and for his novel stylistic enterprise. *Inferno* 30 is Dante's battlecry for the independence he sought from the tyranny of classical examples and of the rhetoricians' rules. It is Dante's manifesto for his revolutionary "new style."

## NOTES

1 "dira lues ira populi Iunonis iniquae / incidit exosae dictas a paelice terras" (*Met.* 7.523-24).

2 "saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram" (*Aen.* 1.4).

3 "tantaene animis caelestibus irae?" (*Aen.* 1.11).

4 . . . veterisque memor Saturnia belli,  
prima quod ad Troiam pro caris gesserat Argis  
(necdum etiam causae irarum saevique dolores  
exciderant animo; manet alta mente repositum  
iudicium Paridis spretaeque iniuria formae,  
et genus invisum et rapti Ganymedis honores) . . .  
(*Aen.* 1.23-28).

5 Bigi cites the symmetry in the syntactical structures as evidenced in the use of a temporal clause at the first tercet of each mythological episode ("Nel tempo che Iunone . . . E quando la fortuna . . ."); the naming of the protagonist in each of the second tercets ("Atamante . . . Ecuba . . ."), etc.; he mentions the frequency of difficult rhymes and the accumulation of epithets for Hecuba ("trista, misera, cattiva, . . . dolorosa, . . . forsennata") (1063-64).

6 In *Convivio* 4.27.17, Dante had already referred to the same Ovidian story as "favola." See Hollander, "Dante's 'Book of the Dead,'" esp. 32-33.

7 See M. Frankel, "Dante's Anti-Virgilian villanello (*Inf.* XXIV 1-21)."

8 Oddly enough, lines 64-72 also anticipate the punishment inflicted on the gluttons in *Purgatorio* 22 to 24, where, from the high rock fell "un liquor chiaro" which "si spandeva per le foglie suso" (22.137-38). Master Adam's words about the drying out of his face are echoed in the description of the gluttons in lines 22-27 of *Purgatorio* 23. And as Forese Donati explains to

Dante:

... "De l'eterno consiglio  
cade virtù nell'acqua e ne la pianta  
rimasa dietro ond'io sì m'assottiglio . . .  
Di bere e di mangiar n'accende cura  
l'odor ch'esce del pomo e de lo sprazzo . . ."  
(23.61-63, 67-68)

It is of course somehow unexpected that in Hell, where matter counts so heavily, Master Adam may be tormented by a mere mental image of the water, while in the more spiritual Purgatory an actual water is needed to trigger the wasting thirst felt by the souls. But in any case there is an undeniable resemblance between the torments of Master Adam and those inflicted in the sixth circle upon Forese and the gluttons on the "monte ove ragion ne fruga" (*Purg.* 3.3), another echo of the counterfeiter's words (70).

- 9 Cf. *Enciclopedia dantesca* s. v. "Guidi," "Guidi, Aghinolfo II" and "Guidi, Alessandro" (3: 318b-20b).
- 10 We do not know, of course, when *Inferno* 30 was written, whether before or after the death of Henry VII, and hence after the crumbling of Dante's hopes in the re-establishment of the empire. As it has been suggested in the case of *Inferno* 19.81-84, where Dante already knows about the death of Clement V in 1314, he may have altered his text *post-factum*. I do not intend to engage here in a discussion about the dating of the *Commedia* which would bring me too far from the subject at hand. I am simply noting the surprisingly unfavorable attitude which Dante displays in this canto towards a family which had shared his expectations about Henry VII and from whose castles "sub fonte Sarni" he had written in 1311 his fiery Epistles in favor of or to the Emperor (6 and 7).
- 11 Colin Hardie has pointed out in a letter to me that Dante could easily have avoided the addition of a Biblical character to the already ample *contaminatio* of this canto by using the classical figure of Phaedra. Dante knew that Phaedra was guilty of the same sin of false charges of seduction as Potiphar's wife, since he refers to Hippolytus' stepmother as "spietata e perfida noverca" in *Paradiso* 17.46-48. The fact that he chose the unnamed Egyptian woman may show Dante's decision to make the mixture of different worlds and cultures as wide as possible. Incidentally, we may remark that in this line 97 we have the only reference to Joseph in the *Commedia*. This is perhaps a puzzling fact when we think that the Hebrew patriarch shares with the prophet Daniel the visionary power to foretell the future on the basis of dreams: a gift that should perhaps have made the two Biblical figures attractive to Dante in view of his own prophetic aspirations. Yet Dante never mentions Joseph again. And, while he does mention Daniel three times, he does so always in passing, giving him only scant attention (see *Purg.* 22.146-47, *Par.* 4.13-15, 29.134).
- 12 Colin Hardie reminded me that Virgil himself is not averse to the genre of the *tenzone*, as can be seen in the rather animated exchange between the two

shepherds in *Eclogue* 3.1–27.

- 13 See, among others, Contini, "Dante come personaggio-poeta della *Commedia*" in *Varianti*.
- 14 That Virgil may also feel a certain disdain for Dante's own way of expressing himself may be revealed by his rather overbearing attitude in *Inferno* 26.72–75 where, not very tactfully, he tells Dante to refrain from speaking to Ulysses: "Lascia parlare a me, ch'i' concetto / ciò che tu vuoi; ch'ei sarebbero schivi, / perch'e' fuor greci, forse del tuo detto." Whatever the reasons for Virgil's imposed mediation, the use of the Greek language is not one of them, as otherwise Dante would not have been able to follow the exchange between Virgil and Ulysses. Rather, Virgil seems to imply that Dante's "detto" would not be elegant enough for the Greek heroes, in short, that Dante was incapable of adopting the high style which was necessary to elicit a response from Ulysses. In fact, when addressing the two Greek heroes, Virgil refers to the "*alti versi*" he had written in the world above (82).
- 15 Cf. in particular *Eg.* 1.6–7, 15–22, 33–34 (from Giovanni del Virgilio to Dante); and Dante's answer to Giovanni's rebuke in *Eg.* 2.36–37, 52–54; and especially his proud claim about the richness, uniqueness and freedom from conventions of his poem: "ovis gratissima . . . lactis abundans . . . Nulli iuncta gregi nullis assuetaque caulis, / sponte venire solet, nunquam vi, poscere mulctram" (58–62).
- 16 In particular by Matthew de Vendôme, Geoffroi de Vinsauf and John of Garland. See Faral.
- 17 Introduction to *De vulgari Eloquentia*, and in *Enciclopedia dantesca* s. v. "stili, Dottrina degli," 5: 435a–438b. For a discussion of this subject, see also Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco* 117–25.
- 18 "sicut vult Oratius in sua Poetria, ubi licentiat aliquando comicos ut tragedos loqui, et sic et converso" (*Ep.* 13.30).
- 19 See on this subject Erich Auerbach's seminal essay "Sacrae Scripturae sermo humilis," originally published in 1944.
- 20 See Bosco's uneasy comment: "Per far di Anteo uno sciocco che si lascia imbrogliare dal discorsetto di Virgilio (che sarebbe dunque da interpretare tutto in chiave ironica) bisogna anzitutto ammettere che Virgilio sia disponibile all'imbroglio, laddove è chiaro che la sua alta nobiltà [non] gli permette . . . di trarre alcuno in inganno" (452).
- 21 For a typical example of the puzzlement felt by the critics, see Getto's comments: "la pagina che segue, tra le più violente del *Paradiso* [è] tra quelle che più lasciano perplesso il critico, posta com'è in bocca alla femminile Beatrice e alle soglie della visione di Dio . . ." (1958); "Con queste immagini rudi di porci ingrassati e di monete senza conio lo sguardo del poeta si muove e fruga su un orizzonte brutalmente terreno. L'atmosfera celeste si è fatta estremamente remota . . ." (1961–62); and more: "crude terribilità," "qualcosa di stonato, che spezza la raffinata misura del *Paradiso*" (1962–63); "l'innegabile debolezza di questo luogo . . . malgrado tutte le giustificazioni possibili, ri-

mane come un vero e proprio difetto: perché quella disarmonia altro non è che mancanza di poesia e assenza di ispirazione." But Getto does admit that Dante's language is open "su ogni forma di vita" (1965).

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## Dante's Paradigms of Humility and the Structure of Reading

In the narrative rhythm of *Purgatorio*, the tenth canto represents a moment of quiescence and reflection, as the wayfarer enters a divine art gallery and muses over the carvings exhibited on its circular wall. This encounter between observer and art objects is from the very beginning reciprocally stimulating, so much so that the carvings seem to come to life in the wayfarer's mind, while in contemplating them he probes—as if engaged in a challenging dialogue—possibilities of being that had previously not been in the foreground of his awareness. The carvings and the wayfarer appear to be confronted with ways of authentically fulfilling their ontological potential in relation to one another, in a prolonged contact which is enriching for both. The purpose of this paper is to examine the manner in which the wayfarer's experience is described by the poet and to sketch out the implications that this text has for a phenomenology of reading.

Reading is here used in its general sense of intentional reception of verbal and nonverbal discourse, such that the analogy between the wayfarer and the reader—the one before a sculpted text and the other before a poetic text—is logically unquestionable and fully available to an inquiry into the nature of the reading experience. On the other hand, phenomenology is not used in its general and paraphilosophical sense of mere description but in its narrow technical acceptance of a science of immanently experienced phenomena, as these become present to human consciousness once the latter assumes the attitude necessary for them to come within the reach of understanding. Our object of investigation is the reading process itself in so far as it can be induced from the phenomena that fill the narrative space of *Purgatorio* 10, and our goal is to determine its structure, that is to say its formal features.

Accordingly the first task is to clarify the nature of the evidence available to an examination of the act of reading. Like all other forms of perception, reading involves two different modes of experience:

one in which there is a direct contact with the text and one in which the reader, through self-reflection, objectifies for his mind his own act of perception so that it becomes itself an object of consciousness. To read is at once to focus on the work to be read and to muse on the thought of the self's role in that act. There can be no reading without such self-awareness, no matter how faint the latter may be. Medieval scholasticism and modern hermeneutics might label the two modes of experience as *actus exercitus*, or the perception of an external entity, and *actus signatus* or the mind's apprehension of itself in the process of perceiving (Gadamer 123). The first is an experience in the intellection of what lies outside the self through a perceptual medium, the second an experience in the intellection of the self by an inward shift in focus.

From a vantage point located in the text, one can say that in the *actus exercitus* of reading the reader becomes an executant through whose agency the text, like a musical score, comes to perceptual life in order to be apprehended by the mind, while in the *actus signatus* that apprehension is concomitantly subjected to critical thought in its process of becoming. Thus, for example, in the poet's account of the wayfarer's reading of the second carving, his recognition of David's translation of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem ("era intagliato lí nel marmo stesso / lo carro e' buoi, traendo l'arca santa," 55-56) is an externally-focused experience clearly distinct from the internally-orientated act of consciousness in which he morally interprets the apprehended text ("per che si teme officio non commesso," 57) by first recalling and then bringing to bear on the text and on himself in relation to it the sense of yet another text, the biblical passage describing the punishment of Uzzah for having profaned the ark with his touch (2 Kings 6.3-7). These preliminary considerations serve to characterize the evidence at hand. Further examples would add only statistical weight to the distinction but could contribute nothing to clarity. Suffice it to say that to the extent that the wayfarer's journey may be regarded as the narrative analogue of a reading process involving texts of different nature (rhapsodized biographical narratives, scientific tracts, lectures, spectacle, symbolic topographic forms and so on), and given that in the Middle Ages an activity that comported the assimilation of new facts could be symbolically conceived as reading (Curtius 326), we may so analyse

the entire *Divine Comedy* with explicit heuristic profit and without running the risk of making gross category mistakes. The chief implication is in any case clear: since in every instance and sort of reading the self experiences the text as well as itself as its reader, a phenomenology of reading, whether this is literally or analogically understood, cannot be carried out without crossing into the realm of ontology.

Analytical rigour requires at this point, on the one hand, the suspension of judgment in the description of the evidence, so as to avoid imprecise thinking about the structure of reading as well as undue categorical steering by the existing literature (Dufrenne, Poulet, Iser), and, on the other hand, the conceptual isolation of the act of reading from adjacent reality, in order to enable its manifesting phenomena to come into clear view and to suggest themselves the best categories for understanding them. In carrying out this procedure—technically known as a reduction, etymologically understood as a leading of the mind back to the thing itself and only to it—we find that the episode of the paradigms of humility is a remarkably convenient textual base. For here the poet has rhetorically isolated the passage from its narrative context by casting it entirely in the static manner of a long ecphrasis (Mazzotta 241), with the consequence that he compels both the wayfarer and the reader to assume a contemplative mode of attention before their respective texts, temporarily blurring away the transitoriness of the moment.

Within the world of the poem, the poet brings the upward movement of the wayfarer to a temporary halt by having him reach a place which draws attention to itself on account of its singularity in the topography of the journey, while on the textual surface of the work he suspends the habitual progression of his diegetic discourse by embedding into it a long parenthetical description. All movement is interrupted as soon as the wayfarer is before the carvings (“Là sú non eran mossi i piè nostri anco,” 28) and is resumed again at the end of his contemplation, when a group of penitents appear on the bank (“Ecco di qua, ma fanno i passi radi, / . . . molte genti,” 100–101). The contemplative mode of the wayfarer looking at the carvings is, as it were, “bracketed” for the reader standing outside the text with his gaze fixed on the manner in which the aesthetic fruition described within actually takes place.

The wayfarer's first contact is with the actual surface appearance of the sculpted text. In approaching the *Divine Comedy* we would do well to remind ourselves that the reading process is a sight-dependent operation and that therefore our first encounter is with the physicality of the text rather than with what lies beyond it. Modern readers are accustomed to read primarily with their minds, as if texts had no graphic substance to them or as if that substance were totally invisible, offering no barrier to vision and no object for meditation. But in the Middle Ages, when rarity and artistic status made books precious objects of contemplation and symbolism for their physical constitution, there must have been a more intimate connection between textuality and its graphic representation. One of the major effects of the printing press was the domestication and devaluation of the book in its intrinsic objective character and hence its almost total withdrawal from the contemplative glance of the reader. Typographical progress has caused all but the dissolution of the physical body of the text. In the Middle Ages, therefore, the analogy between reading a figurative text and a linguistic one, which is the relation that links the reader to the wayfarer in *Purgatorio* 10, must have been much more exact, since in the plastic arts the text's physicality cannot be blurred out of focus without dissolving away artistic form.

The iconicity of the written word, as defined on the one hand by the physical nature of its graphic representation and on the other hand by its dependence on a moment of vision for its very existence, is placed several times in the foreground in the *Divine Comedy*. The clearest and most famous instances occur in the graphic rhyme "sconcia"—"non ci ha" in *Inferno* 30.85–87, the acrostic VOM (man) formed by the initial letters of three consecutive groups of four tercets in *Purgatorio* 13.25–60, and the "cinquecento diece e cinque" prophecy in *Purgatorio* 33.43, the most well known explications of which are actually interpretations of its iconicity as a Roman numeral. In all of these cases, the reader's eye must allow the text to exhibit itself in its material concreteness if it is to function as a channel to knowledge. To see in this manner, which is tantamount to saying to allow the self-givenness of the text, beginning with its physicality, to be seen in its genuineness and in isolation of all else, is to relate to the text in a primordial way.

The wayfarer is very sensitive to this first level of the reading

experience, and the poet duly records his impressions. In *Purgatorio* 10 phrases such as “marmo candido e adorno / d'intagli” (31–32), “quivi intagliato in un atto soave” (38) and “Era intagliato lì nel marmo stesso” (56) do not refer to textual elements in the carvings, components of a discourse accessible only to the mind, but to the material side of that text and to the physical expression of artistic form. Here there is nothing metaphorical about the wayfarer's moment of vision. His reading experience is first of all a coming into contact with the bodily appearance of the text, given that discourse is an object of perception before it becomes an object of intellection. The wayfarer, who had conceived the *Vita Nuova* on the structural image of the copyist, who was perhaps himself an amateur artist (*V.N.* 34.1–3), and who so admired the skill of Oderisi da Gubbio as an illuminator of manuscripts, quite naturally reserved his first appreciation for the text as an observable phenomenon. But modern readers, however familiar they may be with the geometry of futuristic and concrete poetry, find it more natural to transcend immediately all perceptual contact with the physical signs of discourse and to enter the timeless world of pure textuality by means of a vision which is entirely metaphorical. It is for this reason that we must often check our embarrassing tendency to regard as artistically less than authentic all those texts—such as palindromes and, graver still, the *Eva-ave* reversal so central to the *Divine Comedy* as a whole and to this canto in particular—which force the reader to prolong his gaze upon their graphic form. Primordially, all reading is a pictorial mediation of discourse to the mind, and, to that extent, it is authentic when it does not seek to enter the reality beyond before first interrogating the one that meets the eye.

The movement of the reader's attention from the text's physicality to its interior reality comports a different sort of interaction, which can be briefly described in terms of retrieval and synesthesia. Upon contact, textual entities raise in the reader's mind images that belong to previous reading experiences or are peculiar to senses other than that of sight. Before the carving of the Annunciation the wayfarer experiences the consciousness of hearing the word *ave*, but no sound is produced by the marble text; the same thing happens in his reading of the second carving (“a' due mie' sensi / faceva dir l'un 'No,' l'altro 'Sí, canta,'” 59–60), which is

further enriched by the consciousness of smelling, though that sense had received no stimulation ("li occhi e 'l naso / e al sí e al no discordi fensi," 62-63). The consciousness of sensory data without the appropriate referent in external reality is perhaps the most conspicuous aspect of reading, for as the poet reduces a necessarily synesthetic experience of lived reality to metaphorical language when he textualizes it, so the reader begins with that language and reverses the process, directing it towards his own being, wherein he gains consciousness of multisensory phenomena without undergoing any stimulation other than through sight. If in the *actus signatus* of our perception of reality we acknowledge the primacy of sight by linguistically forcing it—as St. Augustine observes in the *Confessions* (10.35)—to absorb our other senses in such common locutions as "see how it smells" and "see how it sounds," and if in the act of writing we further reduce our perception by impressing this metaphorical synthesis on the silent physical presence of a text-in-potency as if, to use an expression dear to Dante, by a seal on wax, in the act of reading we begin with the text couched in the visible form and let it achieve its complete phenomenal life in our consciousness, in such a manner that it may be experientially known in an *actus exercitus* wholly within. That is why the exchange among the marble characters, recorded by the poet as having taken place in the reality of reading, is called a "visibile parlare" (95). That is to say: only sight in so far as it is grounded in the marble text, but sight as well as sound in its phenomenal projection into the reader's consciousness and, consequently, in its manifestation through the *actus exercitus* of his reading experience.

In technical language this may be described as the creation of intentionalities without a real objective pole in the here and now of reading. The textual reality facing the wayfarer does not speak, does not emanate incense smoke, and does not depict the Uzzah episode, but all of these reach in the reader the status of figurative consciousness with the full authenticity of presence. The analogy between the wayfarer and the reader suggests that this is true of every act of reading. This implies that reading is always a creative experience, whoever the reader, and that the source of the intentionalities that represent for a given reader the phenomenal life of the text is en-

tirely personal, being none other than his retentive consciousness of previous readings and experiences of reality retrieved to presence by the text before his eyes.

A suggestion, however, is not an argument, and so the question of the legitimacy of the generalisation inevitably arises. Do the features of reading so far induced from *Purgatorio* 10 indicate general structure rather than empirical contingency? To settle the matter in a rigorous way it would be necessary to look at many descriptions of the process of reading, as many as the number of distinctive traits apparently identifiable in its structure, and hence to determine by comparative analysis which features are indispensable to the conception of its essence, discarding those that have no general validity. This procedure, which corresponds to what phenomenological analysis knows as free variation in phantasy, cannot be fully carried out while remaining within the realm of induction, to which a very limited number of cases may be available for examination. Nevertheless the episode of the paradigms of humility is a singularly convenient empirical base, since it contains three independent descriptions of reading and since, as if to warrant that the reader is before three instances of the same phenomenon, the readings are conducted under the same conditions and on sculpted texts that are progressively more complex variations of a single structural unit.

In fact, in the first carving there are only two figures, Gabriel on the left and the Virgin Mary on the right. In the foreground of the second carving we find again a male figure on the left (David) and a female one on the right (Michal); the carving is further enriched by the background, the choruses and the incense smoke. The third carving is also the representation of a male figure on the left (Trajan) and a female one on the right (the widow), with a further magnification of the background (army, flags, horses). Furthermore the figures of the first paradigm are engraved in a fixed poise. In the second there is a clear suggestion of motion, since David is dancing while Michal is still at the window. In the third paradigm the sense of motion is suggested more forcefully since its very form appears to be carved in the marble ("l'aguglie ne l'oro / sovr' essi in vista al vento si movieno," 80-81). As for the reading process, we notice that the first carving represents a single event in time but that its reading gives rise in the consciousness of the wayfarer to the nonobjective

intentionality of hearing. The second also depicts a single event (the dance of David before the ark of the covenant) but its reading gives rise to the consciousness of hearing and smelling as well as to the recollection of an event described in another text (the punishment of Uzzah). The third paradigm is again limited to one fixed poise (the encounter of Trajan and the widow) but in the act of perception it creates in the reader the intentionality of a dialogue, and this presupposes that reading has temporalized the spatial form and has sent the mind in search of an objective correlate of the verbal exchange in the anecdotal medieval accounts of Trajan's legendary sense of justice. In all three cases the mind of the reader dwells on two sorts of intentionalities: those that have an objective pole in the carving and are mediated by sight, and those that have no such correlate in the here and now of the text, either because they are modalities of consciousness peculiar to other sensory experiences or because their referent is rooted in an earlier reading experience. The structure of reading may therefore be regarded as the pursuit of the objective polarities of nonempirical intentionalities that come into being in the encounter with the text.

The creation of meaning is clearly a collaborative effort involving and affecting both sides of the relation. For in the reading process the text changes the reader's state of consciousness while the reader transforms the state of the text in his consciousness. They are agents of mutual change engaged in the common pursuit of sense. This means that reading cannot be regarded as a mere coming into possession of a textual object but the subjectification of that object into a dialogue partner.

Once the text has been raised to this status, to see is truly also to be seen (Merleau-Ponty 162), and the very condition that enables the text to reveal its essence automatically causes the self to come under observation as well. At its most authentic level, reading is a bidirectional process: to open a book is to open oneself before the book. This act of reciprocal penetration means that the being of the reader *as reader* can be thought out only in terms of his projection into the space of textuality and viceversa, so that being is always a being-there in the other, for both self and text.

In the narrative of *Purgatorio* 10, the being-there of the marble text reveals itself through the wayfarer's vision and is devoid of sense



and existence outside the reality of reading. This is nowhere clearer than in his reading of the third carving. The figures of Trajan and the widow are fixed in the marble, yet the wayfarer's consciousness not only comes into possession of the *esse intentionale* of imagined speech, but also "intends" the unfolding of an entire dialogue, complete with appropriate psychological change in the characters, as the woman's initial anxiety ("di lacrime atteggiata e di dolore," 78) becomes joy, while the emperor's indifference turns to compassion ("giustizia vuole e pietà mi ritene," 93). In other words, only through the wayfarer's gaze and for his consciousness could the marble composition reach its being-there as textuality-before-a-reader and surface in the phenomenon of a nonempirical dialogue. By implication the printed word is only an object until it is read, at which point it becomes a text orientated toward the realisation of its till then only potential ways to be. To read is to enable the graphic form to come to life as text-for-someone. In the age of rhapsodic mediation, when reading had not yet been consigned to solitude and silence but was carried out aloud in the presence of a community, this aspect of the process must have been obvious to everyone. Reading is a performative as well as a perceptive activity, since it brings a text to life prior to making it available for interaction with the reader.

Similarly, it is through and in the texts before them that the wayfarer and the reader become aware of other possible ways of being. As a system of signs, the text is for the reader a projection of order on reality and a set of paradigms for the self's understanding of itself within that order. To read is to let oneself be drawn into the space of textuality and, consequently, to enter a state in which it is necessary to respond with introspection to challenges of one's self-understanding and view of world order. The fundamental dimensions of the reading experience, in so far as it may be regarded as a dwelling of the reader in the world of the text, are the interpretation of signs and the disclosedness of the reader's and text's authenticity. The first of these refers to the fact that signs, by their very nature, are not objects whose value is self-contained in mere presence, for their referential character is itself constitutive of the system in which they occur. Their function is to indicate other objects, thereby allowing other contexts to become accessible to the reader's awareness though he does not actually encounter them here

and now. The emergence of the intentional being of such contexts in the reader's consciousness orientates his hermeneutic attitude towards the text. To raise the intentionality of *Eva* in the reader's consciousness by exhibiting a textual *ave* to his eyes is to place that vision in a network of Christian typology. We can therefore say that, in the reading process, the text presents itself by creating around the reader a world that reaches far beyond the value of its individual components of discourse.

The demand made on the reader by the text is, of course, that he relate hermeneutically to the words—that he see them as signs—and not apophantically, for to seek scientific knowledge of the words in the text would be to assume that the essence of discourse is self-contained and lies in its mere presence. Only the hermeneutic attitude, with its clear implication of the reader's share of responsibility in the production of textual sense, can have ontological significance for him. To interpret a text is to expose areas of one's being and to modify at the same time one's self-understanding. The *Divine Comedy* challenges the reader's self-understanding in the face of the Christian hierarchy of being. In the here and now of actuality being is an orientable dynamic process rather than a static entity, and its only salvific movement is upwards, a direction symbolised in this canto by the worm-butterfly metamorphosis (124–126), that is the ascent of the soul to God (Mazzotta 249). Fallen men, in their inauthentic mode of being, seek ontological fulfillment in a different direction. The inadequacy of their views of the world and of themselves is exposed by the text to the reader as a guide to self-analysis. Their perspective on reality is distorted (“fidanza avete ne’ retrosi passi,” 123), they are no different from insects (“antomata in difetto,” 128), and are deformed into caryatids by the weight of sin (“si vede giugner le ginocchia al petto,” 132). To see oneself and the world through the eyes of a fallen creature, blind to the authentic orientation sought by being, is not to see at all. The intentionality that guides the inauthentic reader is false because its objective correlate is not God. In order to attain the right perspective, in the context of this canto, it is necessary to analyse oneself in terms of pride and humility and to follow the way of humility.

The other fundamental dimension of the reading experience is its mode of disclosedness. This is a phenomenon which must be

interpreted in terms of temporality, not only because reading is necessarily a temporal process, but also and most of all because—as Heidegger's *Being and Time* abundantly teaches—temporality is constitutive of the reader's being. His involvement with the text and his reactions to the challenges that it poses are rooted in the temporal structure of his being. To see how this is so, we must look at the reader-text encounter from the point of view of the three dimensions of time. When his perspective of the world is questioned, the reader becomes aware of other possibilities of projecting order on the universe (the text, as we have seen, represents one such possibility). The figural interpretation of texts and history is really a disclosing of other possibilities in which the text or the historical event can achieve fulfillment. To postulate in the *Eva-ave* typology the Virgin Mary as the mediator of the distance between God and man is to open up the possibility of her instrumentality occurring as an event in the text. And so it is: in the last canto of the *Divine Comedy* the Virgin is beseeched by St. Bernard to intercede with God in order that the pilgrim may be granted the grace of full vision. And to show the penitents bowed as caryatids is to disclose to the wayfarer the possibility of redemption.

Such gathering of the possibilities open to the reader, the wayfarer and the text is in effect the disclosing of potential ways of being implicitly already present in them. Yet possibilities are by their very nature futural. This does not mean that fulfillment lies somewhere beyond, but rather that this beyond, be it spatial (for the text) or temporal (for the wayfarer and the reader), as a possibility, is already to be found in the here of the text and in the now of the wayfarer and the reader. For though possibilities are always rooted somewhere beyond actuality and must be hermeneutically drawn out from contexts intentionally present to the self without being perceptually available to it, their futural dimension is ontologically meaningful to the reader in the here and now of the moment of vision, provided he does not yield to the lure of inauthenticity.

For the wayfarer, disclosedness is quite simply the progressive unfolding of his *fides implicita*, which already contains its full entelechy as a bud—to take advantage of an analogy used by Heinrich Ott—contains embryonically its realised flower (Ott 19). For the work being read, the disclosing of possibilities takes place, on the

one hand, as the mental projection of its potential to be textuality-before-a-reader, and, on the other hand, as the emergence of the individual segments' intentionalities, which, in and for the consciousness of the reader, define the internal structure of the text by linking into a network of relations components of discourse that belong to different moments of vision. Finally for the reader, the disclosedness that occurs in the reading experience is a projection of possible ways of relating to the claims of the text and it is grounded in reflexive thought. Futurity is meaningful because it represents personal eschatology. To understand the text means for the reader to understand its questioning of his mode of being and of his view of the world, which is the same as saying to understand himself his own way of being and his perspective on reality. In reading he becomes aware of the possibility to be other than he actually is, and he feels called upon to make a decision that will radically affect his mode of being before himself.

Disposition to self-analysis and acceptance of responsibility for God's distance from man are necessary conditions for a proper reading of both the purgatorial carvings and the *Divine Comedy*. But from what perspective must this introspection be carried out? Where is the objective correlate of his intentional standpoint to be found if the reader is to face this task with ontological authenticity? The locus in which to stand for such an analysis cannot be anywhere but in the future. The wayfarer, of course, has already made such a choice, though till the end of his journey he cannot fully transcend the limitations of the present and interpret the scheme of things from the clear perspective of eternity. But the reader, standing before a text which speaks to him with what Auerbach described as the authority and urgency of prophecy (Auerbach 304), must suffer a moment of crisis. It is because man has looked at the world inauthentically, hiding in the everyday concerns of the present, that he is in need of conversion. The future, as defined by all the possibilities open to being, is not a circumstantial now that has not yet occurred, but that dimension of the present through which redemption is close at hand. To read authentically the paradigms of humility as well as the *Divine Comedy* is to read them relating intentionally to the future rather than to the past or to the present, since for fallen man the present is only the mode of an actuality that does not reach beyond itself and

the past a reminder that this actuality is a necessary consequence of his previous choices. Only the future can offer us the possibility to choose redemption here and now.

This is the ontological thrust of reading when it is carried out in the authentic mode, with the resoluteness to reach out from the present to a more meaningful plane of existence. It represents the most profound level at which the interaction between the reader and the text can take place. As they dwell in each other, the text and the reader reach a plenitude of being inconceivable outside this dialectic. The text fulfills itself artistically in the fruition process, attaining synesthetic life in the reader's consciousness and drawing sense from the reader's experience as reader. At the same time the reader becomes aware of his ontological potential in the face of the challenges posed by the text and explores the depths of being. For the reader of the *Divine Comedy* this process leads to the discovery that the possibility of salvation awaits his decision.

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## Dante's Three Reflective Dreams\*

### 1. Introduction

Dante scholars have generally considered the three dreams in *Purgatorio* from two points of view. Firstly, since they mark major divisions of the mountain, they have perceived them as important elements in the poet's organization of the *cantica*. Secondly, since dawn dreams have prophetic qualities, as the poet himself emphasizes, following contemporary belief (*Inf.* 26.7, *Purg.* 9.16–18 and 27.92–93),<sup>1</sup> they have seen them as sources of information about future events in the realm. Although interesting connections can be established between the substance of the dreams and later incidents in Purgatory, such *rapprochements* are only possible once the reader has assimilated these subsequent episodes. At the points in the narrative where the dreams occur, they are as arcane to the reader as they seem to be to the pilgrim-dreamer (*Purg.* 9.34–48 and 19.40–42, 55–57), and are, thus, characterized by the mystery and the sybilline register which the poet regarded as the basis of the prophetic.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Robert Hollander has pointed out that, at least as regards the dream of the siren, its first structural effect is not prospective, but retrospective. Writing about the second dream, he claims that:

It is a passage which looks back to the first cantos of *Inferno*; to the central cantos of *Purgatorio* (the center of the poem as a whole), which discourse on love; to its immediate context which is the discussion and presentation of "Sloth," or better, *accidia*, the action of the soul which gives physical surrounding and moral necessity to this dream; and to the context of the first Purgatorial dream. (*Allegory* 136)

Hollander, however, does not develop this insight, concerned as he is to trace figural patterns in the *Comedy*. Yet his observation merits further investigation, particularly as the backward-looking feature of Dante's dreams is unusual when compared to dream-passages in other medieval writers. While the intratextual contacts which Hollander recognizes obviously help to integrate the dream of the

siren into the narrative development of the poem, it seems to me that they are also something more than just simple structural devices. In fact, I shall argue that similar retrospective elements mark the other two Purgatorial dreams, and that the tensions which Dante establishes between the prophetic and other functions of dreaming are consistent with medieval attitudes to dreams and with the general directions of his poem.

## 2. Dante's conception of the dream

In the *Comedy*, despite what one might imagine from reading Dante criticism, the poet is actually ambivalent about the connections between dreams and prophecy. There are five references to this relationship.<sup>3</sup> Two are general allusions to the prophetic power of dreams,<sup>4</sup> which is presented with a certain caution: "*Ma se presso il mattin del ver si sogna*" (*Inf.* 26.7, my italics) and "*a le sue vision quasi è divina*" (*Purg.* 9.18, my italics). Later it is clearly implied that not all dreams can foresee the future: "*il sonno*<sup>5</sup> *che sovente, / anzi che 'l fatto sia, sa le novelle*" (*Purg.* 27.92–93, my italics). In the other two cases, however, Ugolino (*Inf.* 33.25–37) and St. Bonaventure (*Par.* 12.65) are not made to express such doubts, since they refer to specific dreams whose truthfulness was confirmed by subsequent events. The tentativeness with which Dante presents the relationship between dreaming and prophecy reflects a long-established tradition which had its origins in the Old Testament, where only some dreams have divinely instituted prophetic associations, while others are examples of ordinary human activity or can even offer misleading insights.<sup>6</sup> The Church Fathers and Doctors added little to Biblical positions on this point. They continued to distinguish between true and false dreams, and, even more than in the Bible, they presented prophetic dreams as exceptional.<sup>7</sup> In Virgil too, Dante would have found a warning about true and false dreams (*Aeneid* 6.893–96). Given the weight of these *auctoritates*, Dante is both orthodox and prudent in expressing reservations about the relationship between dreams and prophecy. The poet, in fact, elsewhere in the *Comedy*, underlines the intellectual confusion which dreams can bring about: "*Qual è colui che suo dannaggio sogna, / che sognando desidera sognare*" (*Inf.* 30.136–37), "*sì che non parli più com' om che sogna*" (*Purg.* 33.33), and "*Qual è colui che sognando vede, /*



che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa / rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede" (*Par.* 33.58–60). On the other hand, Dante is much more open and consistent about the connections between dreaming and other intellectual activity. His emphasis on the psychological and physiological aspects of dreaming is consistent with developments in medieval Aristotelianism.<sup>8</sup> According to Dante's major definition of dreams in the *Comedy*, they are the product of the human mind: "la mente nostra, peregrina / più da la carne e men da' pensier presa, / a le sue vision quasi è divina" (*Purg.* 9.16–18). At the close of *Purgatorio* 18, the poet explains how this mental process functions. He stresses the intimate relationship between the information which the pilgrim is granted when he is awake, the thoughts this knowledge stimulates in him, and the subsequent transformation of these waking thoughts into dream matter:<sup>9</sup>

novo pensiero dentro a me si mise,  
del qual più altri nacquero e diversi;  
e tanto d'uno in altro vaneggiai,  
che li occhi per vaghezza ricopersi,  
e 'l pensiero in sogno trasmutai.

(*Purg.* 18.141–45)

Dante, in positing the origins of dreams in the preoccupations of the day, is again drawing from the mainstream of the most illustrious tradition of contemporary dream theory. From Macrobius (lib. 1, c. 3) to Alan of Lille (col. 256), and from Gregory the Great (lib. 4, cap. 48) to the author of the pseudo-Bernardian *Liber de modo bene vivendi* (cap. 68), this view was repeated time and again; and, in Christian culture, this idea goes back at least as far as St. Augustine: "Igitur ea quae, ut ita dicam, vestigia sui motus animus figit in corpore, possunt et manere, et quemdam quasi habitum facere; quae latenter cum agitata fuerint et concretata, secundum agitantis et contrectantis voluntatem, ingerunt nobis cogitationes et somnia" (*Epistolae* 9.3).

### 3. The dream of the siren

Given the poet's emphasis at the end of *Purgatorio* 18 on the contacts between dreaming and reflection (and, more generally his emphasis on the pilgrim deliberating on the subject-matter of Virgil's teaching),<sup>10</sup> it is satisfying to note that much of Dante-*personaggio's*

dream of the siren, which follows on immediately at the beginning of *Purgatorio* 19, is a mosaic put together from elements related to his guide's earlier account of the functioning of love in human beings. Firstly, "Ne li occhi guercia, e sovra i piè distorta" (19.8) and "la lingua, e poscia tutta la drizzava" (19.13) mimic "ma quando al mal si torce" (17.100) and "e l'anima non va con altro piede, / se dritta o torta va" (18.44-45);<sup>11</sup> secondly, "cominciava a cantar sì, che con pena / da lei avrei mio intento rivolto" (19.17-18) parodies "Or, perchè mai non può da la salute / amor del suo subietto volger viso" (17.106-07); and, thirdly, "L'altra prendea, e dinanzi l'apria / fendendo i drappi, e mostravami 'l ventre" (19.31-32) subverts "Or ti puote apparer quant' è nascosa / la veritate" (18.34-35) and ". . . m'hanno amor scoperto" (18.41). In fact, the dream of the siren, in its essence, is largely prefigured in the conclusion to Virgil's explanation of the genesis of love:

Or ti puote apparer quant' è nascosa  
la veritate a la gente ch'avvera  
ciascun amore in sè laudabil cosa;  
però che forse appar la sua materia  
sempre esser buona, ma non ciascun segno  
e buono, anco che buona sia la cera."<sup>12</sup>

(18.34-39)

The fabric of the dream not only displays its origins,<sup>13</sup> but also shows the reflective effort going on in the pilgrim's mind, thus offering tangible evidence for Dante's view of dreams as an integral part of mental activity. Even in his sleep, Dante-*personaggio* goes over what he has heard in order to "search out" its significance as he has been bidden. However, on account of his intellectual limitations—he has still far to travel and much to learn—his thinking is far from clear. He muddles Virgil's lucid and logical exposition, fashioning it into a disturbing new synthesis. The gap which exists between the original words and their return in the pilgrim's dream displays the deficiencies of his thought. It is inevitable that he should wake up perturbed (19.40-41, 55-57) and that Virgil should have to reassure him with a further explanation (19.58-60).

The sophisticated rhetorical artistry with which Dante offers a glimpse of his character's psyche also has more general effects. The poet makes the siren enact allegorically the truth of the doctrinal

matter expounded by Virgil. At the same time, through his use of inter-canto repetitions and antitheses,<sup>14</sup> Dante is able to accompany the moral drama with a concrete, textual demonstration of how what is originally good can be transformed into something bad. Thus, just as people pervert their innate capacity to love when they sin (*Purg.* 17.91–114), so the siren, a symbol of the perversion of love, ideologically and formally distorts Virgil's words.

Other elements which make up the dream confirm the reflective state of the sleeping Dante-*personaggio*. The physical appearance of the siren recalls, too, the Abbot of San Zeno's description of Giuseppe della Scala: "mal del corpo intero, / e de la mente peggio, e che mal nacque" (*Purg.* 18.124–25).<sup>15</sup> The Abbot's is the last major speech Dante-character hears before going to sleep; and thus it is plausible that it should be fresh in his mind. However, moments after the pilgrim has finished listening to the fleetfooted cleric, two of the penitent slothful remind him of Aeneas's companions who remained with Acestes in Sicily. And these are the very last words of the second day:

E quella che l'affanno non sofferse  
fino a la fine col figlio d'Anchise,  
sé stessa a vita senza gloria offerse.

(*Purg.* 18.136–38)

The origins of this event—the deception practised by Iris on the grieving Trojan women—have striking similarities to the imminent dream. The details of Virgil's story, now refashioned and confused with other memories, also come flooding into the sleeper's mind stimulated by their earlier periphrastic allusion. Such a reaction on the part of Dante-character is not narratively improbable, since he has been praised for knowing the *Aeneid* "tutta quanta" (*Inf.* 20.114). Thus, Iris's metamorphosis (*Aen.* 5.618–21) and her unmasking by Pyrgo (5.644–49) foreshadow what happens to the siren. Similarities also exist in their appearances: "Qui voltus vocisque sonus vel gressus eunti" (5.649) adumbrates "e poscia tutta la drizzava / . . . lo smarrito volto / . . . / Poi ch'ella avea 'l parlar così disciolto, / cominciava a cantar sì, che con pena / da lei avrei mio intento rivolto" (19.13–18). In addition, and providing further evidence of the muddled state of Dante-*personaggio*, Virgil's description of the goddess also inspires the arrival of the holy lady: "Divini signa decoris. /

Ardentisque notate oculos" (5.647–48) presages "quand' una donna apparve santa / . . . / con li occhi fitti pur in quella onesta, (19.26, 30).<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. The dream of the eagle

Given the central position of the second dream and the ways in which it illustrates the poet's explanation of the connections between thought and dreaming which preface it, this dream can usefully serve as a guide to the reading of the other two dreams: indeed, links between these dreams and the events which precede them are also discernible. The dream in *Purgatorio* 9, famous for its aura of ambiguity and horror, most notably catches the political resonances of cantos 6–8 which it crystallizes in the imperial symbolism of the eagle. However, the sleeping pilgrim transforms these memories into a nightmare by irrationally superimposing onto the eagle his perfectly rational waking fear of the snake (*Purg.* 8.37–42).<sup>17</sup> That this worry should have made such an impact on him again makes narrative sense. Not only is the threat of the devil an unexpected turn of events in Purgatory, but, before the actual appearance of the angels and the snake, Dante-*personaggio* had listened to the princes singing the hymn *Te lucis ante* (8.13–18) which asks God for protection, so that "Procul recedant somnia, / Et noctium phantasmata; / Hostemque nostrum comprime, / Ne polluantur corpora."<sup>18</sup> The poet makes explicit these connections between his character's waking and sleeping worlds by modelling the eagle's behaviour on the descent and swift protective action of the angels:

. . . mi pareva veder sospesa  
un'aguglia nel ciel con penne d'oro  
con l'ali aperte a calare intesa  
. . .  
. . . come folgor discendesse  
e me rapisse suso . . .

(*Purg.* 9.19–21, 29–30)

e vidi uscir de l'alto e scender giúe  
due angeli. . . .  
. . .  
. . . che da verdi penne  
percosse traean dietro a ventilate  
. . .

Sentendo fender l'aere a le verdi ali,  
fuggì 'l serpente, e li angeli dier volta,  
suso a le poste rivolando iguali.

(*Purg.* 8.25–26, 29–30, 106–08)

A recognition of the different points of origin of the first dream enriches our understanding of this event. Given the original positive connotations associated with two of its main elements, the echoes demonstrate that the nightmare is of Dante-*personaggio*'s own making. He unnecessarily equates the Empire and the angels with the snake, the third source of the dream. It is his inability to distinguish adequately between good and evil—a deficiency which the next three days in Purgatory will help rectify—that brings together in his mind things which he ought to have kept apart. Most previous critics have interpreted the dream in a similar key. They have considered it to be a symbol of the wayfarer's state: he is not yet ready to cross the wall of fire separating Purgatory from the Earthly Paradise or to pass through the fiery sphere which medieval cosmography placed between the earth's atmosphere and the circle of the moon; nor is he yet able to assimilate properly the intervention of the divine in his life. This is an excellent reading of the dream-content; yet it ignores the function of the lexical choices which the poet employs to describe the dream in displaying these deficiencies. Dante, by repeating and then synthesizing elements which he had previously presented as separate, not only offers a narratively plausible source for his protagonist's terror, but, more importantly, he is able to offer an insight into the pilgrim's limitations and condition at the very moment when the dream is recounted in the poem. The dream-content, on the other hand, can only offer such a perspective when it is combined with later events in the story, for example, when it is measured against Virgil's explanation of the appearance of St. Lucy (*Purg.* 9.46–63), or against the travellers' arrival in the *girone* of the penitent lustful, or against the vision of the divine eagle in Paradise.<sup>19</sup>

## 5. The dream as mental map: Leah and Rachel

Like the dream of the siren, the pilgrim's vision of Leah and Rachel is prefaced by his "ruminating" on his adventures as he readies himself for sleep (*Purg.* 27.91–93). Once again its substance divulges the nature of his thoughts. The dream recalls Forese's descriptions of his

wife and of his sister. Nella's virtuous behaviour, "quanto in ben operare è più soletta" (*Purg.* 23.93), is remembered in Leah's revelation that "a me l'ovrare appaga" (*Purg.* 27.108); while Forese's evocation of Piccarda, "La mia sorella, che tra bella e buona / Non so qual fosse più, triunfa lieta / nell'alto Olimpo già di sua corona" (*Purg.* 24.13–15), affects Dante-*personaggio's* vision of both the Biblical sisters: "giovane e bella . . . / . . . / 'Sappia . . . / le belle mani a farmi una ghirlanda / . . . / ma mia suora . . .'" (*Purg.* 27.97, 100, 102, 104). Forese's words provide the basic constituents of the last dream. However, elements from the pilgrim's memorable meeting with Arnaut Daniel also return in his dream, thus underlining more boldly its reflectiveness. In particular, details appear from the Provençal poet's presentation of himself, "Tan m'abellis vostre cortes deman, / qu'ieu no me puesc ni voill a vos cobrire. / Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan" (*Purg.* 26.140–42), which the sleeper fashions into the image of Leah: "giovane e bella . . . / donna vedere andar . . . / . . . e cantando dicea: / 'Sappia qualunque il mio nome dimanda / ch'i' mi son Lia, e vo movendo intorno / le belle mani . . .'" (*Purg.* 27.97–102).

As is the case for his treatment of the two earlier dreams, Dante's recourse to allusion to construct the dream of Leah and Rachel offers a convincing insight into his character's psychology (as well as evidence of the great care with which he tells his story).<sup>20</sup> By this device he is thus able to give information on matters which the text does not directly address. The three dreams can be interpreted as mental maps, a view which is in keeping with Dante's ideas on dreaming as an intellectual activity. Rather than glimpses of the future, they are sophisticated signs of the pilgrim's emotional, intellectual, and spiritual condition at the moments when they occur.<sup>21</sup> They can thus be taken as yardsticks with which to measure his progress. Each dream makes us reflect on the previous day's journey and on the pilgrim's relation to it. Thus, in the context of *Purgatorio* 27, the dream of Leah and Rachel, with its serene atmosphere of harmony, and in contrast to the dark and confused overtones of *Purgatorio* 9 and 19, reveals a mind which has learnt its lessons well. In particular, given its dependency on elements associated with love, and in accordance both with the pilgrim's purified state and with his inevitable thoughts of Beatrice stimulated by Virgil's promises (*Purg.* 27.36–42, 53–54),

it suggests that he has achieved a balanced and spiritualized view of love. In fact, the dream, on account of its refined insistence on "beautiful ladies," can be taken as an ideal stilnovist vignette acted out against a lightly sketched, yet highly suggestive *locus amoenus*. All that the pilgrim has seen, experienced, and memorized on his journey, and most especially on the third day, would point to his understanding the erotic in precisely such terms at this stage in his development. To emphasize and prepare for this idea, the poet earlier had both the pilgrim and Bonagiunta declare that stilnovist conventions are the truest linguistic expression of the internal movements of love and of the relationship between thought and love:

E io a lui: "I' mi son un che, quando  
Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo  
ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando."

(*Purg.* 24.52-54)

and

Io veggio ben come le vostre penne  
di retro al dittator sen vanno strette,  
che de le nostre certo non avvenne;  
e qual più a gradire oltre si mette,  
non vede più da l'uno a l'altro stilo.

(*Purg.* 24.58-62)

Dante carefully paves the way for the entry of the *stilnuovo* into the dream.<sup>22</sup> During the course of three closely related encounters, Dante-*personaggio* had recognized the intellectual and artistic superiority of the *dolce stil novo* over other forms of vernacular Italian lyric poetry; he had also been made aware of the especial bonds which tie this verse to love and of his own fundamental achievements in this style. In their conversation, he and Forese had implicitly rejected the conventions of the *comico-realistico* tradition—that most anti-stilnovist of forms—which had inspired their *tenzone* on earth. Their subsequent meeting with Bonagiunta, during which the cardinal position of the *dolce stil novo* was loudly trumpeted, had confirmed that they had been right to acknowledge their earlier poetic and romantic error. Finally, Dante-*personaggio*'s encounter with Guinizelli had ratified the *stil novo* as the supreme Italian vernacular lyric form. These reminders of the values and techniques of the *dolce stil novo* and of his own *stile de la loda*, remembered via the

reference to "Donne ch'avete" (*Purg.* 24.49–51), make a powerful impression on the pilgrim, especially as they are bolstered by many other related events dealing with love: Virgil's exposition of the proper ways of loving, the penitent lustful, the mention of Beatrice, and the passage through the flames. Their return in the dream is almost "inevitable." Under these circumstances, intellectually, aesthetically, emotionally, and spiritually the wayfarer on the edges of the Earthly Paradise could not have been capable of a different or more elevated awareness of love and of his own relationship to it than that which he experiences in his dream.

Dante's handling of the dream emblematically hints at all this, and is a good example of his power of concision and of the *Comedy's* *polisemia*. He takes a few key details from a couple of purgatorial episodes in which the question of love, or more precisely that of love poetry, is raised, and then reworks them into a new narrative which synthesizes the monolingual conventions of the lyric verse of his youth with the plurilingual structures of the *Comedy*. Dante's treatment of the landscape of the dream is in the same vein as his presentation of Leah and Rachel, bringing about a fragile, and, as we shall see, temporary harmony between the "lyric" and the "comic" moments of his poetic career. On the one hand, the landscape evokes the *pastourelle* strand in the *stil novo*. On the other, its more specifically Edenic and Golden Age attributes are the product of a whole array of natural phenomena already seen by the traveller on his journey: in particular, the setting of the castle in Limbo,<sup>23</sup> the beach of Purgatory, the Valley of Princes (especially 7.73–84), the two trees in the *girone* of gluttony, one of which, it should be noted, is an offshoot of the Tree of Knowledge: "e noi venimmo al grande arbore adesso, / . . . / legno è più su che fu morso da Eva, / e questa pianta si levò da esso" (*Purg.* 24.113, 116–17). More generally, the landscape recalls the persistent promise of Eden embedded throughout Purgatory.<sup>24</sup>

The need to seek the kind of alternative explanations which I have suggested for the function and meaning of the dream of Leah and Rachel at the moment at which it occurs in the text, is confirmed by the inconsistencies between its vision and what the pilgrim actually sees and experiences in the Earthly Paradise.<sup>25</sup> The dream offers no clue to the forest, nor to the allegorical obscurity and rigidity of the



procession and of the pageant, nor to the horrific elements of the latter. More crucially, it is quite misleading about Beatrice. Firstly, she is anything but an ideal stilnovist lady on her return; and, in fact, the circumstances of her reappearance, and then her role as eschatological teacher and guide, affirm the deficiencies of *stilnovo* ideology. The balance Dante has established in the third dream, between the love lyric and the *Comedy* is accordingly left behind, and the poem moves on to propose more sophisticated solutions.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, the dream's emphasis on Leah, in the light of Virgil's promises of Beatrice, would suggest that it is she, and not Rachel, who prefigures Dante's lady, especially as in the poem there has been no forewarning of the meeting with or of the need for Matelda. The connection Leah-Beatrice is further stressed by the presence of Rachel in the dream, who, as we know, is Beatrice's neighbour in Paradise, "che mi sedea con l'antica Rachele" (*Inf.* 2.102). The distortion of Beatrice's future role and behaviour stems again from the fact that, even though Dante-*personaggio* has travelled far and learnt much, his knowledge, even of the true extent of the nature of love, is still extremely restricted. His state is largely conditioned by Virgil's intellectual limitations; allegorically this means that the pilgrim cannot see much beyond the range of unenlightened human reason. When Beatrice arrives in triumph, it is her Christian moral severity and her religious connotations which are to the fore. There is no evidence of that femininity, gentleness, and affection which had characterized her visit to Limbo. Such attributes mark the limits of Virgil's knowledge of Beatrice; and they are especially associated with the qualities of her eyes: "Lucevan li occhi suoi più che la stella" and "li occhi lucenti lagrimando volse" (*Inf.* 2.55, 116). It is by recalling those unforgettable eyes that Virgil spurs on his companion ("Li occhi suoi già veder parmi," *Purg.* 27.54), and later bids him, using a formula which tellingly blends the two references from *Inferno*, to enjoy the beauties of the Earthly Paradise while he awaits Beatrice's arrival: "Mentre che vegnan lieti li occhi belli / che lagrimando, a te venir mi fenno" (*Purg.* 27.136-37).<sup>27</sup> Virgil and, by extension, the pilgrim are unable to envisage a different sort of Beatrice at this point; nor can either of them see beyond the qualities she shares with Leah.<sup>28</sup> The dream thus reveals both Dante-*personaggio*'s achievements and his deficiencies. Just as he is about to describe a major new stage in

the journey, Dante pauses to provide an assessment of his character in order to help the reader understand the significance and the need for these new experiences.

## 6. Contrast and repetition in the three dreams

The sophistication of the third dream and its sense of harmony separate it from the tensions and confusion which define its two predecessors. Its striking difference in tone, content, and presentation, when compared with the dreams of the eagle and of the siren, are its most visible and accessible characteristics.<sup>29</sup> In view of its prophetic deficiencies, they are also possibly its most revealing traits, since they are a record of the enormous progress which the pilgrim has made during his travels through Purgatory. Such contrasts are many. Stylistically, the lyricism and stilnovism of the final dream conflict with the harsh, even infernal sounds used to describe the siren (*Purg.* 19.7–15, 31–33) and the descent of the eagle (*Purg.* 9.27–33). Where a certain similarity of tone and vocabulary is present, as with the siren's song (*Purg.* 9.16–24) and Leah's words (*Purg.* 27.99–108), this helps underscore the differences between the singers and their songs. The last dream is quite free of the kind of negative terms found in the other two: in *Purgatorio* 9, for example, "terribil" (29), "rapisse" (30), "io ardesse" (31); in *Purgatorio* 19, for example, "femmina balba" (7), "smarrito volto" (14), "fendendo" (32), "puzzo" (33). The dream of Leah and Rachel is characterized by an overwhelming sense of order and harmony, while the others are marred by conflict, violence, and opposition. As Hollander writes, it is "singularly untroubled. . . , relatively brief and simple, full of the kind of lovingness" which has escaped the "threat of sensuality which causes disorder and death" (*Allegory* 149, 154). On the other hand, such sensuality is directly depicted in the siren and is implicit in the eagle via the reference to Ganymede. Hollander's point is further supported by the pilgrim's untroubled waking in *Purgatorio* 27, and by the absence in the third dream of the theme of captivity which marks the other two. Furthermore, the dominating presence of Leah and Rachel in the final dream is a significant development in the actual presence of positive female figures in the dreams. This also distinguishes it from the others. Earlier, Lucy had appeared in the first dream only by analogy, while the anonymous "donna . . .

santa e presta" had to share the stage with the siren, whose deformities are the reverse of Leah's beauty. Finally, the Biblical origins of the third dream again underline its separateness and superiority: it is less ostentatiously learned yet much more sophisticated and complex than the other two.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, similarities, as well as contrasting elements, are apparent in the presentation and subject-matter of the three dreams: for example, the common stress on the hour of dreaming formulaically introduced by "Ne l'ora che" (*Purg.* 9.13; 19.1; 27.94); the hints implicit in all three that the journey is on the verge of ending (the pilgrim-Ganymede's impending arrival in Paradise-Olympus, the siren's boast that "e qual meco s'ausa, / rado sen parte; sì tutto l'appago!" [*Purg.* 19.23-24], and the recovery of Eden and Beatrice hinted at in the third dream); and, most notably, their common dependence on intratextual elements. However, as with the *rapprochement* between Leah and the siren, these shared features do not confuse the three dreams, but help to confirm the changes that have occurred within Dante-*personaggio* since the last time he slept. Thus, the poet organizes all three dreams around the same structure of intratextual recapitulation and other common elements, because this permits him to create, within a single unified system, a differentiated yet coherent and concrete record of the internal development of the pilgrim and of the ways in which, as Momigliano says, "quell'ombra solenna che è il Dante dei primi due canti dell'*Inferno* si è concretata e svolta in una personalità ricca e salda" (469) by the time he reaches the edge of the holy wood.

It is, in fact, interesting to note that, in organizing the three dreams, Dante appears to have followed the hierarchy which St. Thomas had established for prophetic dreams and visions. This not only establishes further distinctions between the dreams, but also supports the view that they reveal the changes which the pilgrim undergoes during his three days in Purgatory. St. Thomas writes:

Secundo autem diversificantur gradus prophetiae quantum ad expressionem signorum imaginabilium, quibus veritas intelligibilis exprimitur. Et quia signa maxime expressa intelligibilis veritatis sunt verba, ideo altior gradus prophetiae videtur, quando propheta audit verba exprimentia intelligibilem veritatem sive in vigilando, sive in dormiendo, quam quando videt aliquas res significativas veritatis, sicut septem spicae plenae significant septem annos ubertatis, Gen. 41. In quibus etiam signis tanto videtur prophetia esse

altior, quanto signa sunt magis expressa; sicut quando Jeremias vidit incendium civitatis sub similitudine ollae succensae, sicut dicitur Jerem. I.—Tertio autem ostenditur altior esse gradus prophetiae, quando propheta non solum videt signa verborum vel factorum, sed etiam videt vel in vigilando vel in dormiendo aliquem sibi colloquentem, aut aliquid demonstrantem, quia per hoc ostenditur quod mens prophetae magis appropinquat ad causam revelantem.—Quarto autem potest attendi altitudo gradus proprietatis ex conditione ejus qui videtur. Nam altior gradus prophetiae est, si ille qui loquitur vel demonstrat, videatur in vigilando vel in dormiendo; in specie angeli quam si videatur in specie hominis: et adhuc altior, si videatur in dormiendo vel in vigilando in specie Dei, secundum illud Isaiae 6, I: *Vidi Dominum sendentem*. (*Summa theol.* IIa-2ae, q. 174, art. 3)

Dante too moves from silent *signa*—albeit highly expressive ones on account of the presence of fire as in Aquinas's example—to dreams in which things are shown and spoken by women of ever-higher rank and whose appearance becomes increasingly more attractive.<sup>30</sup>

## 7. The dream of prophecy

Though I have underlined the prophetic deficiencies of the pilgrim's dreams, and especially those of his vision of Leah and Rachel, it is also undeniable that, for instance, the third dream does prefigure, with a certain degree of accuracy, both Matelda and the early part of the scene in the Earthly Paradise. In the same way, the dream of the eagle prepares for the pilgrim's resistance at the wall of fire, while that of the siren foreshadows his successful negotiation of the last three purgatorial *gironi*. However, as with the third dream, their overall prophetic status is questionable. The first dream most specifically embodies an event contemporaneous to it, namely, St. Lucy carrying the sleeping pilgrim to the Gate of Purgatory, while the second one does not refer to any single recognizable event, only to a number of general ones: the nature of the sinful dispositions purged on the last three *gironi*, Dante-*personaggio*'s relationship to these sins, the roles of reason and grace in overcoming their snares. Despite the problems affecting the precise prophetic coordinates of the dreams, I should not like to deny that they have this function. To do this would go against both Dante's own stated belief and the connections which can be established between the dreams and what follows in the poem. Furthermore, in the light of the care with which the poet approaches the general question of the visionary power of

dreaming, it is clear that he wishes to stress the actual prophetic status of the pilgrims's three dreams, and thus to underline the uniqueness of his journey. My argument rather is that this aspect should not be exclusively and mechanically applied. Such inflexibility is alien to Dante's practices in the *Comedy*. I believe that the main reason why he calls the traditional prophetic powers of the *somnia* into question both in theory and in practice, is to ensure that the reader seeks out the full connotative potential they have in his poem. In fact, in the light of my discussion, I wonder whether when Dante defines the nature of dreaming as "la mente nostra, peregrina / più da la carne e men da' pensier presa, / a le sue vision quasi è divina" (*Purg.* 9.16–18), "la mente nostra" does not have a double meaning, so that it refers not just to "our mind," but also to "our memory," a meaning which *mente* has elsewhere in the *Comedy*.<sup>31</sup> Such a reading is also supported by the reference in the previous *terzina* to the nightingale which at dawn remembers its sufferings (*Purg.* 9.13–15), the very same hour when the human *mente* is at its sharpest.

## 8. Conclusion

Symbolically the dreams do project into the future; however, in their form, they remain firmly in the present and recall the past. With great subtlety, Dante, throughout his poem, modulates the temporal rhythms of his narrative and establishes structural connections across its whole area. The organization of the three dreams and their positioning in the text are an example of this; they are also a small clue towards a solution of that "central critical problem," highlighted, among others, by Sapegno, "of how the *Comedy* is to be read as a unified whole" (8). A concentration on the "prophetic" effects of the dreams, important as these are, grants only a partial insight into their structural functions and into their connotative range. Nor does it demonstrate how the poet's theoretical statements and accounts of dreams in the *Comedy* synthesize much of the contemporary debate on the subject, and occasionally even add to it. Finally, the customary reading of the dreams conceals the care and genius with which Dante imbues the dreamer's visions with psychological realism. As the repetitions confirm, the dreams emerge out of the pilgrim's memories of his journey. They, therefore, do not only offer the kind of general meanings which the classical, Biblical, and

Christian traditions saw as characteristic of certain dreams ("somniat symbolica et metaphorica" [Albertus Magnus lib. 3, tr. 1, cap. 10]), but, in a highly original move, they are also a symbolic measure of the "private" world of Dante-*personaggio*. In this way, Dante intuitively and makes use of characteristics of the dream which Freud was to study systematically and to stress 600 years later:

If I examine my own experience on the subject of the origin of the elements included in the content of dreams, I must begin with an assertion that in every dream it is possible to find a point of contact with the experiences of the previous day. This view is confirmed by every dream that I look into, whether my own or anyone else's. Bearing this fact in mind, I am able, on occasion, to begin a dream's interpretation by looking for the event of the previous day which set it in motion. (249)

and, like Freud, Dante also distinguishes between two different layers of the dream:

The dream-thoughts and the [manifest] dream-content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them. The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts. If we attempted to read these characters according to their symbolic relation, we should clearly be led into error. (381-82)<sup>32</sup>

As in psychoanalysis, the signifiers of the pilgrim's dreams are the means to "disentangle" his fears, desires, and knowledge.

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## NOTES

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1 On the dreams in the *Commedia*, see Busetto, who primarily compares Dante's views with those of Albertus Magnus in the *De somno et vigilia*; Speroni;

- Norton; Stella; Cervigni, *Dante's Poetry of Dreams*. See also the essays on *Purgatorio* 9, 19, and 27 in the standard collections of *Lecturae Dantis*. In addition, see Raimondi; Marin; Cervigni, "Demonic and Angelic Forces" and "The Pilgrim's Dream." See also Tateo's entries on "sognare" and "sogno" in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*. On dreams in the Middle Ages, see Chenu; Le Goff; Braet (with an excellent bibliography); Fischer; *I sogni nel Medioevo*. All references to the *Comedy* are taken from Petrocchi's critical edition.
- 2 Mineo writes that "L'oscurità è appunto un elemento del genere profetico" (179).
  - 3 Although there is a sixth reference to dreaming and prophecy in the *Comedy*, namely, the allusion to the dream of St. Dominic's mother (*Par.* 12.60), this does not belong to the tradition of the prophetic morning dream, but to that of the prophetic dream of the pregnant woman; see Lanzoni.
  - 4 Dante is quite certain that dreams do have prophetic qualities in both the *Vita Nuova* (2.1–8 and 12.1–9) and in the *Convivio* (2.8.13); see also Appendix 5 to Book 2 of the *Convivio* (249–52); Mineo 103–41; Hollander "*Vita Nuova*"; Baldelli.
  - 5 "Sonno" here does not primarily mean "sleep"; it is rather Dante's vernacular rendering of *somnium*, which, since Macrobius's gloss on this word, as part of his survey of different kinds of dreams, had been extensively used in the Middle Ages to refer to prophetic symbolic dreams: "Somnium proprie vocatur, quod tegit figuris et velat ambagibus non nisi interpretatione intellegendam significationem rei quae demonstratur" (1.3.10). For an especially pertinent example of the medieval *fortuna* of Macrobius's categorization of dreams, see Guido da Pisa 18–20; and "Lorenzo l'apparve [to Elisabetta] nel sonno" (Boccaccio 4.5.12). Furthermore, it is clear from the context of the passage in *Purgatorio* 27—"Si ruminando e sì mirando quelle, / mi prese il sonno; il sonno che sovente, / anzi che 'l fatto sia, sa le novelle" (91–93)—that the *epizeuxis* of *sonno* is used to distinguish between two different physiological stages: the falling asleep and the dreaming. The fact that Dante is using a calque on *somnium*, when he raises doubts about the relationship between dreams and prophecy, makes his uncertainty all the more striking.
  - 6 See Ehrlich.
  - 7 See Souvay 155; Braet 23–33. St. Augustine's twelfth book of his *De Genesi ad litteram* offers a notable and vigorous example of patristic views on the *genera visionum* (cols 453–86); see also Dulaey.
  - 8 See especially Albertus Magnus (lib. 9), and Thomas Aquinas (IIa-2ae, q. 95, art. 6).
  - 9 Baldelli writes that in the *Vita Nuova* "appare poi certo che tali immaginazioni [dreams and fantasies] abbiano . . . carattere profetico, quando siano preparate, per così dire, da intenso pensiero" (1), and he quotes ". . . puosimi a pensare di questa cortesissima. E pensando di lei, mi sopraggiunse uno soave sonno, ne lo quale m'apparve una meravigliosa visione" (3.2–3). All references to the *Vita Nuova* are taken from De Robertis's edition.

- 10 For example, at the end of *Purgatorio* 17, Virgil encourages the pilgrim to reflect further and in private on the lesson on love which he has just heard: "ma come tripartito si ragiona, / tacciolo, accio che tu per te ne cerchi" (138–39). I shall argue that Dante-*personaggio* is doing precisely this as he falls asleep (*Purg.* 18.141–45).
- 11 The repetition of these particular words is an excellent example of how meticulous Dante is in constructing the dream. Lines 44 and 45 are spoken not by Virgil but by the pilgrim, and express a doubt that has arisen in his mind ("m'ha fatto di dubbiar più pregno," *Purg.* 18.42) which his guide cannot properly resolve (46–48). It is, therefore, quite appropriate that this concern should continue to trouble him. See below for a fuller discussion of the ways in which Dante ensures that what the pilgrim remembers is narratively plausible.
- 12 Even Virgil's metaphor of the "mal tardato remo" (17.87) seems to peep through in the dream, since it may lurk behind the siren's reference to Ulysses (19.22–24).
- 13 Umberto Bosco claims that "il sogno non è che la riproposta figurata della necessità, affermata nei canti XVII–XVIII, di scoprire e respingere il brutto e il male che possono nascondersi sotto le apparenze del bello e di bene che le nostre inclinazioni ai piaceri terreni ci propongono" (315). Hollander is even more specific in making this point: "the siren comes, not only from Dante's reading in Ulysses literature, but from the text of Virgil's discourse on love" (*Allegory* 140; however he only quotes the example of *Purg.* 18.44–45 discussed above). On the other hand, Margherita De Bonfils Templer argues that "se consideriamo il sogno solo come 'profetico' . . . delle tre forme di amore deviante delle ultime cornici, finiamo coll'offuscare la funzione ch'esso ha, nel contesto poetico del *Purgatorio*, di coronamento di tutto il lungo ragionare che l'ha anticipato nei tre canti precedenti" (42).
- 14 For a fuller discussion and bibliography on classical and medieval theories of *dispositio*, see Barański, "*Inferno* VI. 73" (11–13).
- 15 There are other less explicit contacts between the dream and earlier episodes of the *Comedy*: (i) Hollander compares the latter part of the dream with the situation in *Inferno* 2.49ff (*Allegory* 141–43); (ii) "quand' una donna apparve santa e presta" who immediately asks a question (*Purg.* 19.26–29) recalls "surse in mia visione una fanciulla [Lavinia]" who too asks a question (*Purg.* 17.34–36).
- 16 Note also the relationship between "Nam mihi Cassandrae per somnum vatis imago" (*Aen.* 5.636) and "mi venne in sogno una femmina" (*Purg.* 19.7). This borrowing raises an interesting critical problem. Line 7 does not properly belong to the dream; it is more precisely an example of the poet's knowledge of Virgil, as, in effect, are the other borrowings from *Aeneid* 5. However, since these can also be coherently associated with Dante-*personaggio*'s memory ("l'alta mia tragedia . . . / . . . che la sai tutta quanta," *Inf.* 20.113–14), they reveal a suggestive area in the *Comedy* where the poet and the character



overlap. In fact, a similar point can be made for all the intratextual allusions I discuss in this article. They are evidence of Dante's remarkable memory of his own text, a feature noted by Contini; yet, at the same time, they are also evidence of Dante-*personaggio*'s "mind," since the poet employs the echoes in the dreams in a manner which is consistent with the psychological development of his character.

- 17 Piero Calì notes that "from the incursion by the serpent into 'la picciola vallea' (*Purg.* viii.98) of the Kings and Princes . . . springs the dream of *Purgatorio* ix" (104).
- 18 The entire hymn is given in Singleton, *Purgatorio: 2. Commentary* 161, from where I take my quotation.
- 19 The dream of the eagle, by "displacing" an unspoken waking preoccupation (*Purg.* 8.40–42) into a new symbolic narrative, suggestively embodies an *avant la lettre* example of Freud's theory of the "return of the repressed." Furthermore, Virgil, like the psychoanalyst, decodes the "latent dream-content" (*Purg.* 9.46–63), thus helping to dispel his "patient's" anxiety: "A guisa d'uom che 'n dubbio si raccerta / e che muta in conforto sua paura, / poi che la verità li è discoperta, / mi cambia' io; e come sanza cura / vide me 'l duca mio . . ." (*Purg.* 9.64–6).
- 20 Dante's presentation of the two dreams of the *Vita Nuova* does not rely on intratextual borrowings, although their origins are nominally to be found in events which precede them. The first is stimulated by the meeting with Beatrice (3.1–3), the second by the character's appeal to Amore for help (12.2).
- 21 Glyn Norton observes that "as in the preceding dream of Canto 9, the mental preoccupations of the diurnal world are to intrude upon the matter of the dream [of canto 19]" (356), and earlier he notes the poem's need for "a periodical recapitulation of mental states and attitudes to prepare for the final revelation of some ultimate truth" (351). Despite the emphasis on retrospection in the title of his article, Norton does not enter upon a detailed discussion of how the dreams actually connect with what precedes them. See also Armour 125; Ferrante 220; Cervigni, *Dante's Poetry of Dreams*.
- 22 For a general discussion of Dante's recovery of *dolce stil novo* forms in *Purgatorio*, see Bosco.
- 23 See Pertile.
- 24 See Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice*; Battaglia.
- 25 Bruno Porcelli goes as far as to label all three dreams "preavvisi di aspettazioni fallaci" (288).
- 26 Scholars are increasingly coming to realize that it is a primary feature of Dante's extremely original elaboration of the rhetorical category of the "comic" that it can accommodate and exploit within its structures other traditionally "non-comic" registers, and, at the same time, supersede them by highlighting the deficiencies of their conventions; see, for example, Barberi Squarotti; Barchiesi; Iannucci; Picone; Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco*. Dante's *Commedia* is not simply a plurilingual text, nor even a pluristylistic and a plurirhetor-

ical one, but one which proposes a radically new artistic language, style, and rhetoric. The implications of this are too complex to develop here. The problem of the nature of Dante's views on the "comic" is the subject of a book I am preparing; for a preliminary discussion, see Barański, "Re-viewing Dante."

- 27 A clue that Beatrice should be associated with Rachel rather than Leah is available in the dream, namely, the reference to Rachel's "belli occhi" (*Purg.* 27.106).
- 28 Singleton was the first, as far as I know, to recognize that Beatrice combines the attributes of both Leah and Rachel: "the dream of Leah and Rachel is fulfilled at the summit: Leah is attained when that justice is reached to which Virgil guides; and Rachel, who is contemplation, is attained in Beatrice. And yet, no sooner have we said as much than we are obliged to recognize, in the matter of Leah as the active life and justice, that Leah is really attained, in final perfection, with Beatrice" (*Journey to Beatrice* 123).
- 29 Differences naturally exist between the first two dreams, not least because of the changes which have taken place in the pilgrim. However, they are not as marked as those which divide both of them from the final dream. For example, the dream of the eagle is born of an irrational impulse while that of the siren is more closely associated with rational thought; the greater narrative complexity of this second dream; and the introduction of a lyrical register into the latter (*Purg.* 19.15–24).
- 30 There is another suggestive point of contact between St. Thomas's discussion of dreams in the *Summa theologiae* and Dante's presentation of the dreams in *Purgatorio*. St. Thomas argues that there are four causes of dreams: "Sciendum est ergo quod somniorum causa quandoque quidem est *interius*, quandoque autem *exterius*. *Interior* autem somniorum causa est duplex.—Una quidem animalis, in quantum scilicet ea occurrunt hominis phantasie in dormiendo circa quae ejus cogitatio et affectio fuit immorata in vigilando; et talis causa somniorum non est causa futurorum eventuum; unde hujusmodi somnia per accidens se habent ad futuros eventus; et si quandoque simul concurrant, erit casuale.—Quandoque vero causa intrinseca somniorum est corporalis: nam ex interiori dispositione corporis formatur aliquis motus in phantasia conveniens tali dispositioni; sicut homini in quo abundant frigidi humores, occurrunt in somniis quod sit in aqua vel nive; et propter hoc medici dicunt esse intendendum somniis ad cognoscendum interiores dispositiones.  
Causa autem somniorum *exterior* similiter est duplex, scilicet corporalis et spiritualis.—Corporalis quidem in quantum imaginatio dormientis immutatur vel ab aere continenti, vel ex impressione coelestis corporis; ut sic dormienti aliquae phantasie appareant conformes coelestium dispositioni.—Spiritualis autem causa est *quandoque* quidem a Deo, qui ministerio angelorum aliqua hominibus revelat in somniis, secundum illud Num. 12, 6: *Si quis fuerit inter vos propheta Domini, in visione apparebo ei, vel per somnium loquar ad illum*" (IIa-2ae, q. 95. art. 6; italics in original). Dante's dreams, too, as

I have argued in this article, are brought about by St. Thomas's first "interior" influence: however, Dante and Thomas obviously disagree about the prophetic status of such dreams. This is not the only instance where the poet absorbs the theologian's lesson on dreams only to adapt it to his own needs. Thus, Dante's dreams can also be seen to be stimulated by St. Thomas's two "exterior" causes: the heavens at the hour of their occurrence ("Ne l'ora che . . .") and God, since, whatever their limitations in this direction they do, in Ugolino's words, "rip away the veil of the future." In addition, Dante, as regards the dream of the eagle, invents a further cause behind this dream, namely a direct physical action on the sleeper—St. Lucy transporting him to the Gate of Purgatory. That the second "interior" cause—the physiological one—finds no place in Purgatory is not surprising, as it would have been narratively and allegorically inconsistent for the pilgrim to suffer illness in this realm.

31 See Maierù, "memoria" and "mente."

32 Freud is adamant about the originality of his discovery of the disjuncture between "dream-thoughts" and "manifest dream-content": "We have introduced a new class of psychical material between the manifest content of dreams and the conclusions of our enquiry: namely, their latent content, or (as we say) the 'dream-thoughts,' arrived at by means of our procedure. It is from these dream-thoughts and not from a dream's manifest content that we disentangle its meaning" (381). However, it is clear that Dante appreciated such distinctions when he came to compose his three purgatorial dreams; and, though the poet owed much to contemporary dream theory, I have been unable to find a possible source for this aspect of their presentation.

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## Dante "Mistico"?\*

Come si sa, la critica dantesca è profondamente divisa sulla relazione che intercorre tra teologia (intesa nel senso patristico, come esperienza religiosa) e poesia. Da una parte, il vecchio crocianesimo mal disposto a indagare motivi che non siano "squisitamente poetici," o comunque tendente a escludere il motivo religioso come in ogni caso indecifrabile (di qui la svalutazione del *Paradiso* rispetto alle altre cantiche). Dall'altra le letture che fanno del motivo religioso, dell'esperienza religiosa, l'ispirazione centrale della *Commedia*. Come è noto, per alcuni critici (Nardi, Sarolli), Dante parla con voce consapevolmente profetica; per altri (Singleton), si propone di imitare il modo di scrivere di Dio. Altri ancora, meno ambiziosamente, spiegano la particolarità della poesia di Dante richiamandosi a un'esperienza religiosa, intesa in senso psicologico, comune a tutti i credenti ma espressa nella *Commedia* con particolare efficacia "poetica." Così per esempio Giovanni Getto: "Questo sentimento della Grazia come gioia profonda che fa trasalire l'anima, come interiore pace che inonda il cuore, fatto ricco di un improvviso dono e di un'ignota ricchezza, è per l'appunto il sentimento teologico e nello stesso tempo umanissimo, su cui Dante imposta la sua massima espressione poetica" (199). Lo stesso contenutismo che affianca una teologia e una poesia quanto mai indefinibili si trova nel Fallani, di cui cito un passaggio tipico: "dopo la mistica folgorazione, si placa il mondo dottrinale, la cultura e la storia; ogni prospettiva dantesca ha ritrovato al di fuori di sè l'ordine dell'universo, dentro di sè la beatitudine di Dio" (244). Comune alle posizioni solo apparentemente opposte della critica, diciamo così, laica e di quella cattolica, è l'assegnare l'esperienza religiosa, o, in senso generico, mistica, e l'esperienza poetica, o, meglio, il fare poesia, ai due tradizionali e opposti versanti del contenuto e della forma. L'"interiore pace che inonda il cuore" è un sentimento, un contenuto su cui il poeta "imposta" la sua "espressione poetica," forma intoccabile che ha il solo difetto di adattarsi male, vestito troppo corto e troppo stretto, al "dono" e alla "ricchezza" soggiacenti.

Prima di procedere oltre, conviene intendersi sul termine “mistica.” Per il *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, il fenomeno mistico è “in primo luogo un movimento per superare se stessi in direzione di un oggetto particolare, nè semplicemente profano, nè eterno, ma situato al di là dei limiti dell’esperienza normale, empirica”; “in secondo luogo, . . . la percezione intuitiva di questo oggetto o di questo essere, sia già caratterizzato da tratti personali, sia in condizione di entità profonda o cosmica” (voce “mystique”). Vorrei attenermi alla genericità di questa definizione che ci risparmia l’illusoria chiarezza della “gioia dell’anima” e lascia imprecisato il terreno su cui questo movimento si verifica. Il seguito dell’articolo del *Dictionnaire*, trattando della mistica cristiana del Medioevo, ci informa che “il significato attuale del termine, con l’accento sul carattere esperienziale e l’importanza conferita agli elementi e alle condizioni psicologiche che permettono di comprenderlo,” compare per la prima volta all’inizio del ’400.<sup>1</sup> Nonostante poi l’articolo, ad opera di altri autori, si soffermi dettagliatamente sulle caratteristiche dell’esperienza mistica cristiana, sempre a proposito di mistica medievale si afferma che dell’esperienza in quanto tale “si ignora tutto,” mentre l’unico indizio sono dei testi che riferiscono dei ricordi. E questi testi, prosegue l’articolo, sono sempre già il risultato di un confronto. Quando poi si passa ad altri testi meno personali, quali le prediche, le lettere, i trattati, il livello di redazione è quello del confronto delle idee ricevute e del linguaggio religioso di un luogo determinato. Sono affermazioni di estrema importanza, dalle quali però gli autori dell’articolo non traggono le conseguenze che si potrebbero trarre, e cioè che la mistica, se si guarda bene, non ha altro luogo che il linguaggio, e più precisamente il linguaggio in quanto già dato e cioè la scrittura.<sup>2</sup>

Mistica e scrittura costituiscono, e non solo nel Medioevo, un binomio inscindibile. Jean Leclercq, monaco benedettino egli stesso, dedica tutto un libro, *L’amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu*, a studiare il rapporto tra questi due sentimenti, per concludere che i monaci benedettini e cistercensi—San Bernardo *in primis*—che ci hanno lasciato le loro opere mistiche “non sono veramente divisi tra ricerca dell’arte e la ricerca di Dio, tra la retorica e l’esigenza di superamento insita nella loro vocazione, tra la grammatica e il desiderio escatologico. La retorica è diventata una parte di loro stessi” (169–70). Le af-



fermazioni di Leclercq si riferiscono ovviamente ai monaci dotti della tradizione benedettina, a quelli che hanno studiato e scritto (anche se tutti i monaci che vogliono seguire la regola devono saper leggere). Tanto più significativo diventa allora il confronto con l'altro filone della mistica medievale, quello rappresentato dalle donne, spesso non monache, di norma meno colte degli uomini e a volte addirittura analfabete. Angela da Foligno (1248-1309), terziaria francescana dopo essere stata moglie e madre, analfabeta, si sente spinta a dettare la sua esperienza a un frate francescano. Una dettatura difficile, sia dal punto di vista delle circostanze in cui avviene (il frate viene ripetutamente richiamato dai suoi superiori per la sconvenienza di questa privata registrazione della parole di una donna), sia da un punto di vista direi stilistico (ma già molto più che stilistico): Angela infatti non solo non si contenta di vivere la sua esperienza "mistica" in segreto, ineffabilmente, non è paga di una "gioia dell'anima" trasfigurante. A rischio suo e di altri, Angela detta: "Qua vero causa et quomodo ego indignus scriptor coactus, ut credo, a deo fuerim ad scribendum et predicta Christi fidelis omnino coacta fuerit ad dicendum, reperietur scriptum infra" (2). Ma c'è di più, come dicevo, perchè la scrittura del frate viene criticata come arida e oscura: "Et alia vice quando ego relegabam ei ut ipsa videret si ego bene scripseram, et ipsa respondit quod ego sicce et sine omni sapore loquebar; et ammirabatur de hoc. Et alia vice exposuit illa dicens: Per ista verba recordor que dixi tibi; sed est obscurissima scriptura; quia ista verba que legis michi non explicant illa que portant: ideo est scriptura obscura" (42). Altre volte Angela sembra ostentare una comprensione superiore del funzionamento della scrittura per eccellenza, la Sacra Scrittura: "intelligo ideo illud, quomodo facta est Scriptura divina; illud, quomodo facta est difficilis et facilis; illud, quomodo videtur dicere et contradicere" (238). "Le saint qui devient mystique reçoit une fonction scripturaire," ha scritto Michel De Certeau (139). Alla funzione si accompagna, perfino in una donna analfabeta come Angela, la consapevolezza della stessa, consapevolezza che entra a costituire la stessa "esperienza mistica." In un passo del *Liber de experientie*, oscuro ma suggestivo, dopo aver detto che lo Spirito Santo le ha dichiarato che, se lei lo amerà ancora di più, le saranno date grazie più grandi di quelle date a San Francesco, la mistica dichiara: "In istis verbis cepi dubitare multum, et dixit an-

ima sibi: Si tu esses spiritus sanctus, non diceres istud michi, quia non possum inde habere vanam gloriam. Et respondit: Modo cogita, si tu de omnibus istis potes habere unam vanam gloriam qua extollaris. *Et exeas de istis verbis si potes*. Et ego incepti et conata fui velle habere vanam gloriam, ut probarem si erat verum illud quod dixerat, et si erat spiritus sanctus. Et incepti respicere per vineas, ut exirem de illo, scilicet, de illa locutione” (48; il corsivo è mio).

Se l'esperienza mistica riveste intrinsecamente un carattere scritturale, si può temporaneamente concludere almeno che mistica e poesia hanno in comune di essere sistemi di organizzazione del reale mediante la scrittura. Le ascendenze mistiche di Dante sono state abbondantemente indicate dagli studiosi, e del resto sono riconosciute nella lettera a Cangrande. A me però non interessa tanto sottolineare una similarità di nodi retorici, quanto piuttosto indicare una comune scaturigine, un modo di porsi davanti alla scrittura e quindi al mondo. Se il mistico è un credente che si costituisce come scrittore, il credente Dante è uno scrittore che dice “io” come il mistico.<sup>3</sup> Per indicare l'atteggiarsi del mistico, la tradizione mistica ricorre a un termine chiave preso da San Paolo (Ef. 3.12): *parrhesia*, che in greco classico significa la libertà di prendere la parola nell'assemblea del popolo, privilegio del libero cittadino. Generalmente i commentatori non prendono in considerazione la connotazione *langagièr*e del termine, soffermandosi invece sul suo contenuto teologico: è l'Incarnazione che rende possibile la *parrhesia*. A me sembra che in questo caso richiamarsi al valore originario del termine non equivale a erigere l'etimologia a metafisica, ma serve a illuminare un carattere della mistica anzi il carattere fondamentale della mistica, che finora è stato poco visto e poco studiato.<sup>4</sup> Angela da Foligno, dopo aver affermato che la Scrittura “aliquid balbutit,” proclama che “quamvis ego blasphemem dicendo et male dicendo illud quia non possum illud loqui,” tuttavia “in illo manifestare Dei intelligo et habeo totam veritatem” (240), dunque in un certo senso asserisce, dettando, il proprio diritto a “rifare” la Sacra Scrittura, o per lo meno ad affiancarle un testo, il proprio, costruito sulla verità tanto quanto la parola di Dio. Così il prendere la parola di Dante o, piuttosto, il suo riprendere la parola dopo gli esperimenti giovanili,<sup>5</sup> sgorga da una libertà di parola, *parrhesia*, ef-

fetto della partecipazione alla grazia dell'incarnazione, per cui non sarà semplicemente blasfemo dare al proprio poema la qualifica di "sacrato."

Sulla relazione tra i termini "poema" e "sacro," Angelo Jacomuzzi scrive delle pagine molto penetranti, là dove insiste sulla loro inscindibilità e sulla subordinazione, in un certo senso incontestabile, dell'aggettivo "sacro" al sostantivo "poema." Per Jacomuzzi, che si prefigge di ridurre lo iato tra ispirazione religiosa e poesia in Dante, opponendosi sia all'impostazione che diremo crociana, sia a quella di cui Singleton è il proponente più illustre, Dante "si pone al culmine della tradizione letteraria del medioevo latino e romanzo, raccogliendo in sè, nella figura dello scriba, la ricchezza vitale e l'attesa escatologica del tempo, e insieme, nella figura del poeta, l'idea di un operare artistico che è intrinsecamente artificio e di uno scrivere che è sempre un 'dictare,' che cerca la solidarietà del lettore nell'universo del discorso e non in quello del verisimile e della storia" (99). Jacomuzzi illustra l'interdipendenza dell'elemento "sacrale" e di quello poetico soprattutto attraverso il *topos* dell'ineffabilità. "L'indicibilità del fatto mistico della visione fonda . . . l'arbitrarietà del fatto linguistico, rivela la forma generale della *Commedia* come 'poema sacro' non nel momento della definizione contenutistica, ma in quello della definizione strutturale nella quale i due termini non si dispongono come solidali e convergenti, ma come opposti in tensione tra loro" (150). Pur essendo pienamente sottoscrivibile, questa formulazione va riaggiustata mediante due considerazioni che mi sembrano fondamentali: una riguarda il carattere dell'esperienza mistica, l'altra l'assetto retorico-formale del *Paradiso*, in particolare dell'ultimo canto.

Ho già accennato al carattere intrinsecamente scritturario dell'esperienza mistica. Resta da esplicitare una considerazione rimasta implicita nelle osservazioni precedenti e che meriterebbe di essere trattata più profondamente in altra sede. Dire che l'esperienza mistica è intrinsecamente scritturaria significa demitizzarne radicalmente il senso. Se da una parte il mistico è la percezione intuitiva di un aldilà dell'esperienza empirica normale (per attenerci alla definizione tradizionale del *Dictionnaire*), e dall'altra è una ricerca di parole, un'ostinata lotta con l'angelo in vista di una ri-scrittura del già scritto, allora questo aldilà si riduce a un punto, uno zero, un'ori-

gine fuori dal linguaggio ma da sempre intrappolata in esso. Un aldilà demitizzato, cioè radicalmente sciolto dal mito che lo nomina e come lo avvolge. L'esperienza mistica è questo divisorio, questa superficie a due facce, questa lamina che vibra a contatto dello zero, dell'innominabile,<sup>6</sup> del sono-quel-che sono; questa superficiale scrittura tremante, che si attraversa per risolversi nel desolato giubilo del silenzio. Il linguaggio che così si produce, appoggiato per così dire all'indicibile, è un linguaggio "falso" (il *quasi pro truffis* di Angela da Foligno), staccato da qualsiasi pretesa di corrispondenza alle cose. Afferma De Certeau: "au lieu de supposer qu'il y a quelque part du mensonge et qu'à le dépister et déloger on peut restaurer une vérité (et une innocence?) du langage, le préalable mystique pose un acte qui conduit à utiliser le langage tout entier comme menteur" (241). Non so se è il caso di sottolineare ancora quanto il "falso" e il "finto" si tocchino, quanto la "falsità" intrinseca all'espressione mistica non sia di lega diversa dalla fittività dell'espressione poetica. C'è però una differenza: la falsità del linguaggio mistico come la sua dolorosa novità si configurano come tali rispetto a una autorità che le precede. Il linguaggio mistico è un controcanto a una scrittura autorevole, nel nostro caso la Sacra Scrittura. Il mistico pretende di fare lo stesso discorso della Scrittura (e dell'autorità ecclesiastica che lo interpreta), ma si arroga il diritto e l'autorità di farlo in maniera diversa. Rimando alla conclusione la precisazione inevitabile riguardo alla direzione del linguaggio dantesco.

Vorrei adesso soffermarmi brevemente su alcuni aspetti retorico-formali del *Paradiso*, per vedere se si trovano qui delle indicazioni sul luogo a cui assegnare la scrittura di Dante. Il *topos* dell'ineffabilità, così frequente nella terza cantica, non è univocamente interpretabile in senso mistico. Jacomuzzi insiste sul fatto che le dichiarazioni di ineffabilità non hanno come funzione "l'esaltazione del personaggio o dell'accadimento"; "ciò che si evidenzia . . . non è propriamente la trascendenza paradisiaca della visione, ma la eccezionalità della situazione psicologica e linguistica, il ponderoso tema, il limite ultimo toccato dall'artista, la condizione critica, insomma, dell'invenzione poetica" (124-5). Se si leggono due tra i più importanti di questi passi, non si può non essere d'accordo sull'importanza che in essi riveste quella che si potrebbe chiamare la metaretorica di Dante.

"Apri li occhi e riguarda qual son io:

tu hai vedute cose, che possente  
se' fatto a sostener lo riso mio."

lo era come quei che si risente  
di visione oblita e che s'ingegna  
indarno di ridurlasi a la mente,

quand'io udi' questa proferta, degna  
di tanto grato, che mai non si stingue  
del libro che 'l preterito rassegna.

Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue  
che Polimnia con le suore fero  
del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue,  
per aiutarmi, al millesmo del vero  
non si verria, cantando il santo riso  
e quanto il santo aspetto il faceva mero;  
e così, figurando il paradiso,  
convien saltar lo sacrato poema,  
come chi trova suo cammin riciso.

Ma chi pensasse il ponderoso tema  
e l'omero mortal che se ne carica,  
nol biasmerebbe se sott'esso trema:

non è pileggio da picciola barca  
quel che fendendo va l'ardita prora,  
né da nocchier ch'a se medesmo parca.

(*Par.* 23.46-69)

Se quanto infino a qui di lei si dice,  
fosse conchiuso tutto in una loda  
poca sarebbe a fornir questa vice.

La bellezza ch'io vidi si trasmoda  
non pur di là da noi, ma certo io credo  
che solo il suo fattor tutta la goda.

Da questo passo vinto mi concedo  
più che già mai da punto di suo tema  
soprato fosse comico o tragedo;

ché, come sole in viso che più trema,  
così lo rimembrar del dolce riso  
la mente mia da me medesmo scema.

Dal primo giorno ch'ì vidi il suo viso  
in questa vita, infino a questa vista,  
non m'è il seguire al mio cantar preciso;

ma or convien che mio seguir desista  
più dietro a sua bellezza, poetando,  
come a l'ultimo suo ciascuno artista.

(*Par.* 30.16-33)

È vero, come afferma Jacomuzzi, che “solo una lettura arresa a priori alle abitudini esegetiche o ai luoghi comuni della parafrasi critica può avvertire come prevalente in questi passi l’eco verbale di un’esperienza mistica” (121). È vero anche però, dal mio punto di vista, che “l’eco verbale di un’esperienza mistica” non è necessariamente (anzi, lo è raramente, e comunque questo fenomeno non ci interessa) eco verbale di un’emozione psico-fisiologica, e ancor meno di una “visione” letteralmente intesa: se di eco verbale si tratta (ma ormai queste parole sono inadeguate), allora è l’eco di uno sforzo, già all’origine del linguaggio, di costeggiare da vicino l’aldilà del linguaggio stesso. Jacomuzzi continua: “Il loro oggetto proprio non è tanto un accadimento, la visione obliterata e indicibile, quanto il poema, nella sua definizione—il sacro poema—e nelle sue metafore—l’ardita prora, il cantar; o, più precisamente, il modo *fictivus*, *transumptivus*, *poeticus* insomma, della trattazione, così energicamente richiamato nei rinvii letterari e non mistici e sacrali” (121-2). Non si può non riconoscere che in questi passi sia sottolineata la “fatica dell’invenzione” (122). La drammaticità dei rinvii letterari è però meno evidente quando si rifletta sull’utilizzo indiscriminato, proprio al medioevo, degli autori di qualsiasi fede. Leclercq, nell’opera citata, non si stanca di sottolineare quanto questa pratica fosse diffusa negli ambienti monastici—gli stessi da cui nasce la letteratura mistica: nemmeno l’*Ars amandi* sfugge all’integralismo, per dir così, dei santi medievali. Quando si oppongono in maniera irriducibile “letteratura” e “religione” a proposito di fenomeni medievali, si rischia di attribuire al passato categorie di pensiero che sono invece solo le nostre.

Prima di concludere sul modo in cui la consapevolezza diciamo artistica di Dante agisce sulle ragioni della sua scrittura, vorrei però esaminare brevemente altri due aspetti formali che mi pare contribuiscano ad accentuare ulteriormente il carattere mistico, nel senso che sono venuta precisando, del *Paradiso*. Si tratta rispettivamente del *topos* del vedere e di quella che è stata diversamente chiamata trasparenza, allusività, estenuazione, incorporeità della terza cantica. Secondo Jacomuzzi, “il ‘vidi’ che segna con variata intensità e frequenza il racconto della visione lungo tutto l’arco delle tre cantiche . . . sta a indicare il momento più alto della mitizzazione, la coincidenza di visione e invenzione, rivelazione e linguaggio, e sottolinea

energicamente la potenza e la sufficienza della rappresentazione" (150-1). Mi riservo di analizzare questo *topos* in altra sede. Ma mi pare di poter affermare che, almeno nel *Paradiso*, l'insistenza sul vedere si ribalta di fatto in un'assenza di visione. Nell'*Inferno* avveniva che l'oggetto della visione incalzasse la rappresentazione dell'atto del vedere:

Come le rane innanzi alla nimica  
 biscia per l'acqua si dileguan tutte,  
 fin ch'a la terra ciascuna s'abbica,  
 vid'io piú di mille anime distrutte  
 fuggir cosí dinanzi ad un ch'al passo  
 passava Stige con le piante asciutte.

(*Inf.* 9.76-81)

Nella terza Cantica il vedere si esplicita ben altrimenti:

Beatrice tutta ne l'eterne rote  
 fissa con li occhi stava; ed io in lei  
 le luci fissi, di là sú remote.  
 Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei,  
 qual si fe' Glauco nel gustar de l'erba  
 che 'l fe' consorto in mar de li altri dei.  
 Trasumanar significar per verba  
 non si poría; però l'esempio basti  
 a cui esperienza grazia serba.

(*Par.* 1.64-72)

Quel che Dante "vede" in Beatrice è questo: una similitudine che squalifica l'unicità dichiarata dell'esperienza, incalzata da una riflessione metaretorica che ci fa toccare i limiti del linguaggio. Il Sapegno qui commenta: "Il vertice della tensione poetica si colloca, per così dire, al di là della rappresentazione propriamente detta, nell'entusiasmo che accompagna la rievocazione di un'esperienza ineffabile e nello sforzo che il poeta compie per renderne partecipe il lettore" (nota a *Par.* 1.66). Ma si tratta davvero della "rievocazione di un'esperienza ineffabile," oppure l'esperienza è precisamente quella dell'impossibilità della visione, della sconfitta del linguaggio?<sup>7</sup> Il canto 30 del *Paradiso*, dopo la preghiera di San Bernardo, non è che un susseguirsi di annunci di visione, annunci che vengono o immediatamente ribaltati nell'impossibilità di rappresentare, o seguiti da un oggetto della visione che per definirsi deve ricorrere ai modi di un linguaggio preesistente:

Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna  
 legato con amore in un volume,  
 ciò che per l'universo di squaderna;  
 sustanze e accidenti e lor costume,  
 quasi conflati insieme, per tal modo  
 che ciò ch'i' dico è un semplice lume.

(Par. 33.85-90)

Non si può dire che questa rappresentazione sia molto originale, dato che si limita a riprendere, fin nella terminologia, concetti artistotelici e scolastici. E più avanti:

Ne la profonda e chiara sussistenza  
 de l'alto lume parvermi tre giri  
 di tre colori e d'una contenenza;  
 e l'un da l'altro come iri da iri  
 pareo riflesso, e 'l terzo pareo foco  
 che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri.  
 Oh quanto è corto il dire e come fioco  
 al mio concetto! e questo, a quel ch'i' vidi,  
 è tanto, che non basta a dicer "poco."

(115-123)

Anche qui, la dichiarazione di impossibilità ad esprimere incalza una rappresentazione che non fa che riformulare pallidamente, sotto una leggera patina di immagini, un concetto tratto da un linguaggio persistente (il simbolo niceno: *lumen de lumine*). Vediamo ancora i versi 127-132:

Quella circolazion che sí concetta  
 pareva in te come lume riflesso,  
 da li occhi miei alquanto circunspecta,  
 dentro da sé, del suo colore stesso,  
 mi parve pinta de la nostra effige;  
 per che 'l mio viso in lei tutto era messo.

Sconfitta della rappresentazione nel momento stesso in cui il poeta intende metterla in gioco: L'Incarnazione è detta in un linguaggio che appena si discosta dal linguaggio teologico. Anche per questo verso—la visione che "vede," ma solo quello che è già stato visto—viene confermata la scaturigine "mistica" del *Paradiso*. Dire le stesse cose, ma dirle in maniera "falsa," *modo fictivo, quasi pro truffis!*

E veniamo brevemente all'"incorporeità" della poesia del *Paradi-*



so. La critica oscilla tra la svalutazione e la celebrazione, poli solo in apparenza opposti di un unico presupposto ideologico che intende la *Commedia* come rappresentazione mimetica della realtà. Così, mentre da una parte il *Paradiso* viene ritenuto poeticamente inferiore rispetto alla trionfale rappresentatività dell'*Inferno*, dall'altra viene giustificato in quanto attinente ad una indefinibile poesia degli affetti soprannaturali (impostazione, quest'ultima, che fa irresistibilmente pensare alla dottrina medievale e dantesca dei corpi aerei). A me sembra che la definizione globale più appropriata (ammesso che sia legittimo fare tali generalizzazioni) della poesia del *Paradiso* sia quella di poesia "lasca," poesia dalla maglie larghe, allentata rispetto alla mimesi, appoggiata al silenzio. Prendiamo un passaggio che tra l'altro si riferisce anche al *topos* del vedere:

Come a raggio di sol che puro mei  
per fratta nube già prato di fiori  
vider, coverti d'ombra, li occhi miei;  
vid'io così piú turbe di splendori,  
folgorate di sú da raggi ardenti,  
senza veder principio di fulgóri.

(Par. 23.79-84)

Ecco Dante, il sommo artefice della lingua, passare in due terzine dalla precisa articolazione verbale di un brano di esperienza sensibile ad un balbettio ostinato in cui il silenzio è prepotentemente in agguato. Ecco una terzina, la seconda, che mentre si dichiara rappresentazione di un oggetto della vista, si frantuma per così dire in un cumulo di vocaboli, tutti connotanti "luce" (splendori, folgorate, raggi, ardenti, fulgori), che stentano a formare una immagine. Una specie di vittoria di Pirro: vince la parola, o piuttosto la scrittura, per ora, ma a che prezzo! Questo toccare i limiti del linguaggio, questo cedere le armi, questo "désespoir très proche du ravissement" (Blanchot 10), non sono altro che l'esperienza mistica, vibrazione nel linguaggio del silenzio dell'origine.

Dante "mistico," allora? Anche accettando una ridefinizione di esperienza mistica in cui sia integrato come essenziale l'aspetto scritturario, è ovvio che Dante non tollera di essere semplicemente assimilato agli scrittori spirituali del medioevo. Non perchè, come tradizionalmente la critica sottolinea, egli sia troppo preso dal "terrestre," ma per la coscienza linguistico-retorica che lo sorregge. Non

a caso Dante nasce alla scrittura prima di approdare alla mistica, e fin nella *Commedia* si può rintracciare un percorso che è di superamento e di distacco nei confronti di modi poetici anteriori, meno vicini alle regioni del silenzio. Abbiamo visto che anche il “mistico puro” è consapevole, intrinsecamente, costitutivamente, della artificiosità della sua scrittura, proprio mentre si dice implacabilmente spinto a parlare. Ma forse è più del mistico-poeta disposto a “terminare,” pur nel terrore, perchè si affida “subito” a un silenzio culturalmente connotato in maniera positiva. Il mistico-poeta (ma forse in questa categoria non c’è che Dante a rientrare) oscilla tra il silenzio e un linguaggio che, per il fatto di essere così coscientemente il prodotto di una ricerca, di un’arte, rischia di scollarsi dalle ragioni ultime, vivendo per così dire da solo, di una vita tragicamente precaria. Come si ripete volentieri, Dante sta a cavallo tra il medioevo e l’età moderna, Ulisse che per poco non soccombe alla follia del proprio volo: da una parte, tenuto ancora saldamente da un’adesione profonda (la “fede”) ad una particolare definizione culturale di “aldilà” nel senso di ragione ultima, origine; dall’altra, follemente, coscientemente aggrappato alla propria “orazion picciola” nella quale rischia di consumarsi, lingua fatua e frodolente.<sup>8</sup> Questo bilico è precisamente la condizione che rende possibile la *Commedia*.

Vorrei citare per concludere questo brano di Mallarmé (66):

Oui, je le sais, nous ne sommes que des vaines formes de la matière, mais bien sublimes pour avoir inventé Dieu et notre âme. Si sublimes, mon ami!, que je veux me donner ce spectacle de la matière, ayant conscience d’être, et cependant, s’élançant forcenément dans le rêve qu’elle sait n’être pas, chantant l’Ame et toutes les divines impressions pareilles qui se sont amassées en nous depuis les premiers âges, et proclamant, devant le Rien qu’est la vérité, ces glorieux mensonges!

Il libro di Mallarmé è, come sappiamo, impossibile. Quello di Dante, nella sua “disagguaglianza” (*Par.* 15.82), è riuscito per tre cantiche a superare ogni “passo forte” e sta quasi blasfemo, al di là del vero e del falso, a trascinarci nella propria fragilità.

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## NOTE

- \* Il presente saggio è una versione riveduta di una conferenza fatta a Yale nell'ottobre del 1985.
- 1 Si tratta di una precisazione importante: quando si parla di mistica oggi, si tende a caricare il termine del peso psicologico di cui lo hanno accresciuto gli scrittori spagnoli del '500.
- 2 Si potrà obiettare che la gioia dell'anima esiste: può darsi, ma questo fenomeno riguarda la psicologia e la neurobiologia, non la poesia e neanche la mistica.
- 3 Questa affermazione è ovviamente da modificare, e lo sarà nel seguito dell'articolo.
- 4 L'eccezione, e di grande rilievo, è rappresentata dagli studi di Michel De Certeau, prematuramente scomparso agli inizi del 1986.
- 5 Il luogo obbligato qui è il passo della "mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei" (V.N. 42.1).
- 6 Cf. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* 134: "I'm in the middle, I'm the partition. I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating."
- 7 Non si deve trarre da questo, come qualcuno ha fatto, la conclusione che l'arrendersi di Dante di fronte all'oggetto della visione è un'altra spia dell'assenza di "autentica" esperienza mistica in Dante: anche i mistici canonizzati, se a volte descrivono qualche "visione," sottolineano che queste non hanno niente a che fare con l'essenza della loro conoscenza di Dio.
- 8 Mi ispiro qui alla bella analisi che del canto 26 dell'*Inferno* fa Giuseppe Mazzotta nel suo libro *Dante, Poet of the Desert*.

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## La “viva speranza” di Dante e il problema della salvezza dei pagani virtuosi. Una lettura di *Paradiso* 20.\*

1. I canti del cielo di Giove (*Paradiso* 17–20) sono dedicati alla trattazione della grande tematica della *Salus*. Questa tematica soteriologica Dante però non la intende più nella sola prospettiva terrena e mondana, secondo il modello della poesia delle “armi” di Bertran de Born, come faceva nel *De vulgari eloquentia*; ma la trascrive ricopiandola direttamente dal Libro che contiene la parola divina, secondo cioè il modello analogico scritturale, in una prospettiva diventata ormai eterna. Dall’alta specola della sfera paradisiaca Dante può così offrire al suo lettore una definitiva soluzione, teorica e pratica, del problema della giustizia: sia del funzionamento della giustizia divina (problematica che sta al centro dell’*inventio* del poema sacro), sia della realizzazione e dei limiti della giustizia umana. Significativamente Beatrice, condensazione delle tematiche della *Venus* e della *Virtus*, rimane assente dall’azione narrativa, e non partecipa alla discussione ideologica che prende sviluppo in questi canti. Il suo posto viene preso dalla “bella image” dell’aquila: una sorta di arci-personaggio col quale l’*actor* si confronta, e nel quale compiutamente si ritrova.<sup>1</sup>

Il canto 20, che qui direttamente ci interessa, ripropone in modo chiasmatico la strutturazione del canto che lo precede. In tutt’e due i canti la materia si organizza infatti attorno a due discorsi pronunciati dall’aquila: ma mentre nel canto 19 il primo discorso è centrato sulla questione teorica e teologica della giustizia divina, e il secondo sulla questione pratica e storica dell’ingiustizia umana (si offrono *exempla* della presente corruzione della giustizia nel mondo cristiano); nel canto 20 invece il primo discorso considera degli *exempla* positivi di giustizia umana (tutti però proiettati verso un passato archetipico e mitico), e il secondo affronta il problema teorico della giustizia

divina, del quale propone due codicilli (i due casi-limite relativi alla sorte eterna di Traiano e Rifeo).

I nodi tematico-ideologici del 20 canto del *Paradiso* si trovano incuneati dentro le due partizioni fondamentali del testo che abbiamo ora evidenziato. Il primo nodo è costituito dal problema della continuità/discontinuità fra mondo pagano e mondo cristiano, e rappresenta la cristallizzazione di una tematica più generale, quella del ritrovamento del filo conduttore della storia umana (tematica svolta soprattutto nel primo discorso dell'aquila: vv. 31-72); il secondo nodo è invece formato dal problema della salvezza dei pagani virtuosi, e rappresenta la punta di diamante della grave questione teologica della predestinazione divina (questione agitata nel secondo discorso dell'aquila: vv. 88-132). Cercheremo di sciogliere questi nodi all'interno di una *lectura* articolata del testo dantesco.<sup>2</sup>

I sei principi giusti che formano la parte più nobile dell'aquila, l'occhio, sono presentati, nel primo discorso del "santo uccello," nel rispetto assoluto delle proporzioni testuali (due terzine per ogni personaggio) e secondo una rigorosa struttura anaforica, per mezzo della quale viene enfatizzata l'opposizione fra passato terreno e verità parziale (prima terzina), e presente celeste e verità totale (seconda terzina). Essi si distribuiscono anche in misura uguale fra principi che vissero prima di Cristo (David, Rifeo, Ezechia) e principi che vissero dopo Cristo (Traiano, Costantino, Guglielmo II); ciò che crea una linea di separazione ideale fra i due gruppi. A segnare il confine sta l'evento capitale nella storia dell'uomo: l'Incarnazione di Cristo. È a partire da questo momento, infatti, che il tessuto dei rapporti fra l'uomo e Dio, lacerato dalla Colpa, ha potuto essere ricucito; e che l'immagine divina dell'uomo, oscurata dal peccato originale, ha potuto essere restaurata. Di qui la giustificazione ideologica del rinvenimento, in due punti identici dei canti 19 e 20 (ai vv. 103-5), dell'allusione alla fede nella Passione di Cristo, inizio necessario della reintegrazione umana nella condizione divina: "A questo regno / non salí mai chi non credette 'n Cristo, / né pria né poi ch'el si chiavasse al legno"; "D'i corpi suoi non uscir, come credi, / Gentili, ma Cristiani, in ferma fede / quel d'i passuri e quel d'i passi piedi."<sup>3</sup>

Il canone dei principi giusti intende offrirci, in una prospettiva fortemente raccorciata, la storia dell'*imperium christianum*, nei suoi

archetipi, biblico (David e Ezechia) e classico (Rifeo), e nelle sue tappe evolutive essenziali, romana (Traiano), romano-cristiana (Costantino) e feudale-cavalleresca (Guglielmo II). Preliminari alla nostra indagine del canto sono l'accertamento delle motivazioni sottostanti alla selezione di tali nomi, e la spiegazione del loro inserimento in questo punto particolare del viaggio salvifico.<sup>4</sup>

Se ideologicamente scontata è la scelta di David ad occupare il posto d'onore (la "pupilla" dell'occhio dell'aquila) in questa *élite* principesca (egli rappresenta infatti la *radix Jesse* dalla quale dovrà uscire la *virga* di Maria e il *flos* di Cristo), meno scontata è la funzione testuale del suo inserimento:

Colui che luce in mezzo per pupilla,  
fu il cantor de lo Spirito Santo,  
che l'arca traslatò di villa in villa:  
ora conosce il merto del suo canto,  
in quanto effetto fu del suo consiglio,  
per lo remunerar ch'è altrettanto.

(37-42)

Le opere terrene che stanno alla base del "merto" di David ("merto" sul quale si è posata l'illuminazione divina) sono politico-religiose ("l'arca traslatò di villa in villa"),<sup>5</sup> e soprattutto poetiche ("fu il cantor de lo Spirito Santo"): e andrà enfatizzato il fatto che Dante fa qui riferimento alla scrittura letteraria ("in quanto effetto fu del suo consiglio"), non alla scrittura ispirata del libro sacro, all'*auctor* umano non all'*Auctor* divino.<sup>6</sup> È proprio a proposito di questo "canto" umano, canto di penitenza per i propri peccati e di lode a Dio per la sua misericordia; è proprio a proposito di questa storia di un'anima che dall'abisso del peccato si innalza alla vetta della grazia, che si crea un evidente parallelismo con il "canto" della *Commedia*, con la storia del *viator* che dalla selva infernale si è innalzato fino alla visione di Dio.

Ad un'esigenza profondamente autogiustificativa sembra rispondere anche l'inserzione del terzo spirito, Ezechia (sul secondo, Traiano, così come sull'ultimo, Rifeo, dovremo sostare più a lungo nella parte finale della nostra *lectura*):

E quel che segue in la circonferenza  
di che ragiono, per l'arco superno,  
morte indugiò per vera penitenza:

ora conosce che 'l giudicio eterno  
non si trasmuta, quando degno preco  
fa crastino là giú de l'odierno.

(49-54)

Immotivati appaiono i dubbi dell'esegesi moderna sulla validità dell'identificazione del terzo "fuoco" dell'occhio dell'aquila con il giusto e saggio re d'Israele, Ezechia: identificazione basata soprattutto su un capitolo di *Isaia*, il trentottesimo, che è vitale anche per la *fictio* globale del poema sacro. La vita di Ezechia si divide nel racconto biblico in due parti: quella che ha già trascorso in una condizione di malattia, e quella che gli resta ancora da vivere, se gli verrà concessa la guarigione; al centro sta il paventato *descensus ad inferos*, il viaggio nel regno della morte: "Ego dixi: in dimidio dierum meorum vadam ad portam inferi" (38.10); viaggio rinviato per quindici anni a causa dell'intervento divino propiziato dal profeta Isaia. Anche la vita del *viator* appare divisa nella *Commedia* in due parti: la prima metà vissuta nella *regio dissimilitudinis*, la seconda metà nella *regio similitudinis*; al centro si pone il temuto *descensus ad inferos*, il viaggio nel regno della morte spirituale: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura"; viaggio che il protagonista vorrebbe rinviare, ma la cui necessità è affermata da Virgilio ("a te convien tenere altro viaggio"), e la cui realizzazione è predisposta da Dio: attraverso tale catabasi infatti potrà essere scongiurata non la morte terrena, bensì quella eterna del poeta-pellegrino e dell'umanità che egli rappresenta.

La funzionalità del successivo medaglione dedicato a Costantino (lo storico conciliatore dei diritti dell'Impero con i privilegi della Chiesa) sembra risiedere non nel rispecchiamento della biografia letteraria del poeta (come David, Ezechia, e poi Rifeo), ma nell'occasione che esso offre all'*actor* di pronunciare una palinodia rispetto a giudizi precedentemente formulati sul conto dell'imperatore romano:

L'altro che segue, con le leggi e meco,  
sotto buona intenzion che fé mal frutto,  
per cedere al pastor si fece greco:  
ora conosce come il mal dedutto  
dal suo bene operar non li è nocivo,  
avvegna che sia 'l mondo indí distrutto.

(55-60)



Naturalmente è qui questione della famosa *Donatio Constantini* (dell'alienazione cioè di poteri di esclusiva giurisdizione imperiale in favore della Chiesa), sulla quale la riflessione dantesca si era già in precedenza dedicata. Nel *De Monarchia* in particolare Dante aveva manifestato (accetto la datazione nardiana del trattato politico)<sup>7</sup> un moto di aperta sfiducia nei confronti della provvidenzialità e della giustizia divine, allorquando si era rivolto ad analizzare questo episodio-chiave dei rapporti fra Chiesa e Impero: "o felicem populum, o Ausoniam te felicem, si vel numquam infirmator ille Imperii tui natus fuisset, vel numquam sua pia intentio [cfr. v. 56] ipsum fefellisset" (2.11.8); la *ratio* umana, se avesse potuto, avrebbe voluto strappare quella pagina funesta dalla storia del mondo cristiano. Lo spirito col quale lo stesso evento viene trattato nel *Paradiso* è totalmente cambiato: vista dalla specola della *fides*, illuminata dalla luce della grazia, la donazione, benché apportatrice di tristissime conseguenze storiche ("avvegna che sia 'l mondo indi distrutto"), appare perfettamente accettabile, in quanto facente parte della superiore programmazione divina, imperscrutabile dagli uomini e non totalmente accessibile neanche agli stessi beati; ciò che conta *ora*, nella prospettiva eterna, è la "buona intenzion," il "ben operar," non il "mal dedutto" da azioni compiute obbedendo al volere divino.

Del lungo periodo che intercorre fra la stabilizzazione dei rapporti dell'Impero con la Chiesa e l'epoca moderna, una sola figura di principe giusto viene qui celebrata: quella del re normanno Guglielmo II, il quale favorendo le nozze di Costanza d'Altavilla con Enrico VI di Svevia aveva propiziato la nascita dell'"ultima possanza" della casa sveva, dell'imperatore Federigo II (cfr. *Par.* 3.118-20):

E quel che vedi ne l'arco declivo,  
 Guiglielmo fu, cui quella terra plora  
 che piagne Carlo e Federigo vivo:  
 ora conosce come s'innamora  
 lo ciel del giusto rege, e al semblante  
 del suo fulgore il fa vedere ancora.

(61-6)

Guglielmo II, vissuto nella seconda metà del secolo XII, all'epoca cioè della massima fioritura della civiltà cortese, è delegato a dar vita all'ultima vibrazione nel poema sacro di quel mondo definitivamente tramontato, ma anche insistentemente rimpianto, delle "donne

antiche e' cavalieri." La sua fama di principe cortese doveva essere corrente, se la *Cronica fiorentina* falsamente attribuita a Brunetto Latini può affermare di lui: "... Guiglielmo . . . in tucti suoi facti fu savio e gratio sopra gli altri principi del mondo a quel tempo. Nel costui tempo il regnio di Puglia e di Cicilia crebbe e abondò di richeççe e d'allegramento e di gaudio e letitie, più che nullo altro reame del mondo: ché questo re Guiglielmo li teneva in tanta pace, ch'elli non actendeano se none a sonare e ad cantare e dançare. Et quasi elli fecero di nuovo un'altra Tavola Ritonda."<sup>8</sup> Brani cronachistici o narrazioni novellistiche di questo tipo sono quelli che hanno certo fornito a Dante la base documentaria per proclamare Guglielmo specchio perfettissimo del mondo cavalleresco. Basta, in realtà, riflettere sull'opposizione *plora/piagne* per rendersi conto che questa è una spia linguistica della dicotomia valori cortesi/valori borghesi: se infatti il raffinato latinismo *plora* dà voce all'accorato rimpianto per quell'epoca mitica definitivamente scomparsa, il termine volgare *piagne* ha il valore di configurare l'aspra rampogna contro i contemporanei reggitori di quella parte dell'Italia, "Carlo [II d'Angiò] e Federigo [II d'Aragona]." D'altronde l'impiego del verbo "s'innamora," a descrivere l'amore divino per l'anima eletta, sembra definitivamente consegnare questo termine-cardine della tematologia cortese all'Olimpo delle più alte significazioni poetiche.

2. Prima di affrontare lo studio della riscrittura dantesca della leggenda di Traiano e del mito di Rifeo, e di entrare quindi nel campo dei rapporti intertestuali che il canto 20 stabilisce, rispettivamente, con la tradizione narrativa mediolatina e romanza, e con quella poetica classica, è bene svolgere alcune considerazioni (letterarie non teologiche ovviamente) sul problema della salvezza dei pagani virtuosi, e sulla questione connessa dell'intervento diretto di Dio nelle cose dell'uomo (che è poi la definizione tecnica di 'miracolo').<sup>9</sup>

Dal canto 19, vv. 106–14, il lettore ha già appreso che la salvezza dei non-cristiani costituisce la rivelazione della faccia positiva della giustizia divina: la sua infinita misericordia. Così come la condanna dei principi falsi-cristiani (vv. 115–48) rappresenta la dimostrazione dell'aspetto negativo della stessa giustizia divina: la sua ira tremenda. Il modello al quale Dante si ispira in questo brano è naturalmente

quello evangelico di *Matteo* 8.11-2: "Dico autem vobis quod multi ab oriente et occidente venient, et recumbent cum Abraham et Isaac et Iacob in regno coelorum: filii autem regni eicientur in tenebras exteriores." Se Cristo aveva sostenuto che il regno dei cieli verrà chiuso al popolo eletto e aperto ai gentili, Dante amplifica il raggio semantico del messaggio divino sostenendo che nel giorno del Giudizio il Paradiso si aprirà agli Infedeli, ai "Perse" e all'"Etiòpe," alle persone cioè che non hanno avuto sulla terra occasione di ascoltare la parola rivelata. Questi Infedeli potranno anzi leggere in Paradiso nel Libro dei Reprobi la lunga lista di coloro che dovrebbero stare vicinissimi ("prope") a Cristo, perché suoi rappresentanti sulla terra, ma che ne sono invece allontanati in eterno: la lista dei cattivi principi dell'Europa attuale, degli iniqui reggitori delle sorti dell'*imperium christianum*.

Nell'immediato contesto evangelico (*Mt.* 11.12) troviamo anche la citazione che fornisce il tema che viene poi sviluppato nel canto 20. Chi ha voluto avvicinarsi a Dio, anche se vissuto all'interno della cultura pagana, ha ricevuto i mezzi per poterlo fare: gli è bastato, afferma Dante, averlo desiderato ardentemente e sperato attivamente. Benché una simile *conversio* sembri assurda, in quanto forza le leggi stesse della giustizia divina (che richiede la fede esplicita in Cristo morto e risorto per ottenere il passaggio al Paradiso), pure durante la sua visita del cielo di Giove l'*actor* ha occasione di contemplare due *exempla* di tale miracolosa possibilità: Traiano e Rifeo. "Regnum coelorum vim patitur : et violenti rapiunt illud": per Dante la controversa frase evangelica ha un unico significato, e annuncia una verità capitale, come chiaramente indicato dalla sua citazione-parafraresi:

*Regnum celorum* violenza pate  
da caldo amore e da viva speranza,  
che vince la divina voluntate.

(94-6)

Anche *in absentia* della fede, la pratica eccezionale del "caldo amore" (quell'amore capace di portare verso l'alto, verso la Fonte della luce), e della "viva speranza" (quella speranza che permette di intravedere una vita più autentica) possono creare le basi per l'intervento miracoloso di Dio elargente la Rivelazione, e condurre quindi alla salvezza eterna.

Come viene coinvolto l'*actor/auctor* nello svolgimento della grave

tematica della salvezza dei pagani? Se la "speranza" dell'*actor* fin dall'inizio del suo cammino soteriologico (*Inf.* 1.54: "ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza"), è stata quella di poter concludere positivamente e felicemente l'attraversamento dei regni dell'Oltretomba, e di arrivare così alla finale contemplazione, *facie ad faciem*, dell'immagine divina; la "viva speranza" dell'*auctor* è quella che l'umanità possa raggiungere il suo vero obiettivo: la felicità eterna; e, di conseguenza, che le venga concesso di accedere alla porta che sola può immettere a tale acquisizione: la fede nella morte e nella resurrezione di Cristo. La "viva speranza" di Dante, insomma, è che il "paganesimo" si trasformi in "cristianesimo"; realizzando così la vera, autentica 'metamorfosi,' che è quella cristiana del passaggio da uno stato di peccato a uno stato di grazia. La "viva speranza" di Dante è dunque non che il mondo pagano in quanto tale (rimanendo cioè pagano) venga alla fine salvato; ma che il mondo pagano riesca a trovare nella sua propria cultura quella base ideologica e conoscitiva sulla quale si possa posare la Rivelazione. Ora, una simile 'metamorfosi' si realizza al livello della *narratio* nel personaggio di Rifeo, qui celebrato; e al livello dell'*imitatio* e dell'*auctoritas* in quello del poeta Stazio.

Ma l'impegno diretto dell'*actor/auctor* nella tematica trattata si giuoca anche su un altro versante testuale. In ambedue i casi di pagani salvati in questo canto, sia quello di Traiano sia quello di Rifeo, è questione di *miraculum*, di intervento divino che elargisce la Rivelazione, la 'fede esplicita.' Per Dante la possibilità di salvezza in una situazione di obiettiva *infidelitas* non può infatti che essere frutto di una decisione divina, che opera immediatamente (come nel caso di Rifeo) o mediatamente (come nel caso di Traiano/S. Gregorio) infondendo nell'anima prescelta il dono della Grazia. Il merito da solo, le opere buone, non bastano alla salvezza: è necessario il merito divino, l'Incarnazione. La precisazione è importante, perché proprio tale punto è quello che spiega la particolare funzione rivestita da questi personaggi nel poema sacro. Nell'analisi che segue cercheremo precisamente di dimostrare come il racconto inserito della miracolosa elargizione, a Traiano o Rifeo, della grazia divina sia uno specchio nel quale il racconto-cornice del poeta-pellegrino si riflette e si conosce. Lo straordinario privilegio concesso da Dio all'anima eletta di superare una condizione di peccato originario, ha una mo-

tivazione simile a quella vantata dall'*actor*: mostrare al mondo "che mal vive" le verità eterne che a Lui si riferiscono.

3. La realizzazione testuale della salvezza di Traiano nel *Paradiso* dantesco mantiene qualcosa della spettacolarità che essa aveva nella letteratura agiografica.<sup>10</sup> La concessione divina all'imperatore romano della "ferma fede . . . de' passi piedi" (104-5) si svolge infatti all'interno di una scenografia impregnata del gusto del 'meraviglioso cristiano' caratteristico dei *miracles* di Gautier de Coinci o dei *milagros* di Gonzalo de Berceo. Si tratta in realtà di un evento esterno e pubblico, reso universalmente noto da una folta documentazione leggendaria:

Ché l'una de lo 'nferno, u' non si riede  
già mai a buon voler, tornò a l'ossa;  
e ciò di viva spene fu mercede:

di viva spene, che mise la possa  
ne' prieghi fatti a Dio per suscitarla,  
sí che potesse sua voglia esser mossa.

L'anima gloriosa onde si parla,  
tornata ne la carne, in che fu poco,  
credette in lui che potea aiutarla;  
e credendo s'accese in tanto foco  
di vero amor, ch'a la morte seconda  
fu degna di venire a questo gioco.

(106-17)

Allo scopo di meglio comprendere questo episodio della *Commedia* (e l'altro ad esso collegato del 10 canto del *Purgatorio*) è necessario ripercorrere, anche solo nei suoi tratti essenziali, la storia della leggenda di Traiano nel Medioevo.

La leggenda della salvezza di Traiano si articola nelle fonti agiografiche medievali, così come nel poema dantesco, in due racconti distinti. Il primo è il resoconto di un *factum* memorabile: si tratta dell'aneddoto della consolazione della vedova, nel quale l'imperatore romano rinvia pressanti impegni bellici per rendere giustizia ad un'umile donna che insistentemente gliela richiede; in Traiano la preoccupazione della *salus* personale (cfr. *Purg.* 10.89-90: "l'altrui bene / a te che fia, se 'l tuo metti in oblio?"), l'esercizio altissimo della giustizia, "dovere" (92) di ogni regnante, finisce per prevalere su ogni altra cura terrena (è questo *exemplum* che viene riportato,

per esaltare la virtù dell'umiltà, in *Purg.* 10.73–93, e che viene qui ripreso in *sermo brevis* per affabulare il “merto” del personaggio: “colui che . . . la vedovella consolò del figlio,” 44–5). Il secondo racconto è la registrazione invece di un gesto ‘meraviglioso,’ del *miraculum* operato da un santo: papa Gregorio, colpito dall’atto di umiltà e giustizia compiuto da Traiano nei confronti della vedova, ottiene da Dio che l’imperatore, che pure si era reso colpevole di persecuzioni ai cristiani, “torni all’ossa,” venga cioè risuscitato, per potersi pentire dei suoi peccati e convertire al cristianesimo (è questa appunto la materia narrativa che viene riproposta nell’episodio paradisiaco di cui ci stiamo occupando).

Del doppio racconto, esemplaristico e miracolistico, nel quale prende forma la leggenda di Traiano, circolano nel Medioevo varie redazioni, tutte comunque riconducibili a tre tipi fondamentali. Ci sono anzitutto le versioni ‘agiografiche,’ elaborate fra l’VIII e l’XI secolo, e inserite all’interno della *Vita* di S. Gregorio Magno.<sup>11</sup> In queste *Vitae* (la più importante delle quali è quella del diacono Giovanni) l’attenzione è naturalmente calamitata dal potere spirituale del santo, di cui il racconto della giustizia di Traiano e della sua liberazione dalle pene dell’Inferno costituisce una delle prove più eclatanti. L’ipotesi dell’assunzione di Traiano in Paradiso, a conseguenza della negoziazione del papa con Dio, viene in questi testi categoricamente esclusa; come affermato dal diacono Giovanni: “. . . non legitur Gregorii precibus Traiani anima ab inferno liberata et in paradiso reposita, quod omnino incredibile videtur propter illud quod scriptum est: Nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu sancto non intrabit in regnum caelorum; sed simpliciter dicitur, ab inferno solummodo cruciatibus liberata.”<sup>12</sup> Certo però che la citazione del Vangelo di Giovanni 3.3: “Nisi quis *renatus fuerit*. . . ,” offriva ai lettori della leggenda un’indicazione preziosa dello scenario dentro il quale tale salvezza poteva realizzarsi. In definitiva, ciò che nelle versioni agiografiche spiega l’interesse e l’amore di S. Gregorio per Traiano è sí l’atto di giustizia nei confronti della vedova, ma soprattutto il collegamento tipologico che tale gesto esemplare stabilisce con le parole di Isaia (1.17): “Iudicate *pupillo* et defendite *viduam*. . . .” Traiano diventa cioè agli occhi di S. Gregorio colui che ha adempiuto la parola dei profeti: diventa una *figura Christi*.

Esistono poi della leggenda di Traiano le versioni ‘umanistiche,’

situabili nel corso del XII secolo, e inserite in trattati filosofici (come la *Theologia christiana* di Abelardo) o politici (come il *Policraticus* di Giovanni di Salisbury).<sup>13</sup> Lo scopo di queste versioni non è tanto la dimostrazione della 'santità' di Gregorio quanto l'esibizione della 'virtù' di Traiano, considerato come il migliore degli imperatori romani. Il soccorso prestato da Traiano alla vedova viene pertanto visto non più in una prospettiva tipologica (Traiano *figura Christi*), ma secondo un'ottica politico-simbolica (Traiano *speculum principum*). È la drammatica situazione di vedovanza dell'*imperium christianum* (avvertita pressantemente da Giovanni di Salisbury) a richiedere urgentemente l'avvento di un principe virtuoso come Traiano, affinché essa possa essere migliorata. Il risalto assunto dalla *virtus* romana comporta la limitazione, in questi testi, della rilevanza presa dal *miraculum* cristiano, la cui espressione viene affidata a un frettoloso codicillo (sintomatico il periodo dedicatogli dal *Policraticus* [5.8]: "Fertur autem beatissimus papa tam diu pro eo fudisse lacrimas, donec ei in revelatione nuntiatum sit Traianum a penis inferni liberatum . . .";<sup>14</sup> si noti come anche qui sia questione di liberazione dalle pene infernali, e non di salvezza).

Certo però che l'esaltazione umanistica della virtù di Traiano fece fare un notevole passo avanti nel cammino che porta alla sua salvezza. La soglia fra liberazione/salvezza venne comunque superata con le versioni 'scolastiche' della leggenda, circolanti durante tutto il XIII secolo (le più interessanti delle quali sono quelle offerte da Alessandro di Hales, Tommaso d'Aquino e Bonaventura).<sup>15</sup> In queste versioni il nucleo narrativo esemplare-miracolistico della leggenda viene mortificato dall'esigenza dimostrativa e didascalica: viene funzionalizzato cioè a una questione teologica precisa; nella fattispecie: se la virtù pagana sia sufficiente a procurare la salvezza cristiana. In esse si procede inoltre a correggere le incongruenze logiche e gli errori dottrinali registrati nelle versioni agiografiche; in particolare che le pene dell'Inferno possano essere attenuate. La soluzione soteriologica dell'intricata questione teologica (Traiano, un pagano, è salvato da un miracoloso intervento di S. Gregorio), soluzione proposta dai filosofi scolastici, si basa su un'*auctoritas* ben più solida di quella fornita dai primitivi agiografi di papa Gregorio: cioè su un'omelia greca, attribuita a Giovanni Damasceno, della quale si cominciò ad avere notizia in Occidente verso la fine del XII secolo.

La formulazione più coerente di questa soluzione noi la rinveniamo nella *Summa Theologiae* di S. Tommaso:

Praeterea, Damascenus, in eodem sermone, narrat quod Gregorius, pro Traiano orationem fundens, audivit vocem sibi divinitus illatam: Vocem tuam audivi, et veniam Traiano do. Cuius rei, ut Damascenus dicit in dicto sermone, testis est oriens omnis et occidens. Sed constat Traianum in inferno fuisse, quia multorum martyrum necem amaram instituit, ut ibidem Damascenus dicit. Ergo suffragia Ecclesiae valent etiam in inferno existentibus.<sup>16</sup>

Ciò che si evince dalla testimonianza del Damasceno è dunque che Traiano, condannato sicuramente all'inferno a causa della sua attiva *infidelitas*, per l'intercessione di S. Gregorio ricevette la remissione dei suoi peccati, e venne quindi salvato. Sulle modalità di realizzazione di tale salvazione S. Tommaso propone due ipotesi: la prima, più radicale, è che Traiano sia stato risuscitato in modo da potersi pentire e usufruire del dono della grazia; la seconda, più cauta, è che Traiano abbia ottenuto un rinvio del suo giudizio particolare fino al Giudizio finale:

. . . de facto Traiani hoc modo potest probabiliter aestimari: quod precibus beati Gregorii ad vitam fuerit revocatus, et ita gratiam consecutus sit, per quam remissionem peccatorum habuit, et per consequens immunitatem a poena. [. . .] Vel dicendum, secundum quosdam, quod anima Traiani non fuit simpliciter a reatu poenae aeternae absoluta, sed eius poena fuit suspensa ad tempus, scilicet usque ad diem iudicii.

La sospensione della sentenza nelle versioni scolastiche (caratteristica anche delle coeve raccolte di leggende, come la *Legenda Aurea*, dove le ipotesi della restituzione di Traiano alla vita, o quella del rinvio del giudizio divino, sono le prime fra le tante altre proposte) viene decisamente appellata dalle versioni della leggenda di Traiano in lingua volgare (sorte verso la fine del XIII e nel corso del XIV secolo). Potremmo chiamare queste versioni 'letterarie,' nel senso che esse, pur tenendo in debita considerazione la questione teologica, in realtà la superano, proiettandola in una dimensione poetica. I testi più rappresentativi sono i *Fiori e vita di filosafi* (26), il *Novellino* (69) e naturalmente la *Commedia*. Comune ad essi è la necessità di spazzare via le incertezze delle versioni scolastiche e di sposare la soluzione narrativamente più efficace: quella della miracolosa salvazione di Traiano.



Significativamente la tradizione manoscritta dei *Fiori* ripresenta l'esitazione fra epilogo pietistico del racconto (proprio delle versioni agiografiche) e epilogo miracolistico (tipico invece delle versioni scolastiche): la maggioranza dei manoscritti (una ventina) offre infatti la prima soluzione, mentre la seconda viene sviluppata da un gruppetto di soli quattro manoscritti. Appare chiaro il fatto che l'evoluzione redazionale sia qui sintomo della trasformazione del gusto e segua il processo di letterarizzazione del testo.<sup>17</sup>

L'autore del *Novellino*, dal canto suo, riduce l'atto di giustizia di Traiano nei confronti della vedova a un *beau geste* (a una "bella cortesia"), privo di ogni implicazione trascendentale; e al tempo stesso attribuisce all'intervento miracoloso una valenza puramente mondana: "E santo Grigoro orò per lui, e dicesi per evidente miracolo che per li prieghi di questo santo papa l'anima di questo imperadore fu liberata dalle pene de l'inferno, e andone in vita eterna; ed era stato pagano." Ciò che gli preme enfatizzare, infatti, è da un lato il magnifico spettacolo del trionfo della giustizia e del miracolo cristiano, dall'altro la sua brillante traduzione linguistica: il racconto non a caso si sigilla con una squisita figura retorica, nell'opposizione ossimorica di *vita eterna* e *pagano*.<sup>18</sup>

Decisivo e definitivo per la storia di questo tema, così come di tanti altri temi dell'immaginario medievale, l'apporto dantesco. La *Commedia* intende scoprire la *veritas* del destino eterno di Traiano; ciò che coinvolge un dialogo serrato e polemico con le 'fonti': la correzione dei loro errori e la risposta alle loro domande. Credo che sia pertanto irrilevante porsi il problema della 'fonte' specifica secondo la quale Dante avrebbe costruito quest'episodio, poiché in realtà egli ha scrutato l'intero ventaglio delle 'fonti' pertinenti per offrircene un bilancio. La *novitas* del messaggio poetico dantesco sarà allora rinvenibile attraverso un confronto con la serie di testi già evocata.

Rispetto alle versioni precedenti della leggenda, agiografiche umanistiche e scolastiche, versioni tutte caratterizzate da un atteggiamento distaccato nei confronti del fatto narrato e da una finalità didascalica, Dante, portando avanti il processo di contemporaneizzazione dell'*exemplum* iniziato dalle versioni novellistiche, fa di Traiano un mito personale, gli attribuisce una funzione autoconoscitiva. Dante, in altre parole, avvicina la *conversio* del personaggio paradigmatico

alla sua propria *conversio*, la cui descrizione noi vediamo affidata ai primi due canti dell'*Inferno*.<sup>19</sup> Nel contesto specifico, la figura di Traiano viene a rafforzare il significato assunto da quelle di David e Ezechia, di cui abbiamo già discusso.

E in realtà, la storia dell'imperatore che visse due volte, la prima da pagano e la seconda da cristiano, arrivando a sperimentare in tal modo sia la realtà infernale sia la realtà paradisiaca (vv. 47-8: "per l'esperienza / di questa dolce vita e de l'opposta"), si ripete esattamente nel *pattern* narrativo dell'*actor* della *Commedia* che, a metà della sua vita, si ritrova nella selva della lontananza da Dio per iniziare il suo cammino verso la reintegrazione eterna: cammino che lo condurrà a visitare prima il regno della dannazione e poi quello della salvezza. Così come la vicenda della miracolosa rinascita di Traiano alla vita della grazia, giustificata dal proprio "merto" (l'essere simbolo della giustizia terrena) e portata a effetto dall'intercessione di un santo, riflette specularmente la vicenda del personaggio-poeta, che per intervento miracoloso di Dio e per intercessione delle "tre donne benedette" (*Inf.* 2.124), si vede affidato (sulla base dell'esperienza amorosa consegnata al libello giovanile della *Vita Nuova*) il compito di combinare il viaggio classico di Enea col viaggio cristiano di S. Paolo nell'unico viaggio della cristianità decaduta verso la definitiva palingenesi.

4. Un'indicazione ermeneutica di grande rilievo per poterci spiegare la ragione profonda che sta dietro la scelta di Rifeo a completare il sestetto dei principi giusti ci viene da una discrepanza fra *Convivio* e *Commedia* riguardante le omologie storiche stabilite fra mondo ebraico-cristiano e mondo classico.<sup>20</sup> Mentre infatti il *Convivio* propone una correlazione fra il re David, iniziatore della "progenie santissima" che conduce a Cristo, e Enea, iniziatore della progenie imperiale (4.5.6: "E tutto questo fu in uno temporale, che David nacque e nacque Roma, cioè che Enea venne di Troia in Italia, che fu origine de la cittade romana, sí come testimoniano le scritture"); la *Commedia* istituisce una ben diversa corrispondenza fra lo stesso re David e Rifeo: personaggio che passa così a simbolizzare il nuovo padre spirituale dell'*imperium christianum*. Interpreto tale divario come l'indicazione del passaggio da una fase 'umanistica' della cultura di Dante (rappresentata dall'enciclopedia filosofica del *Convivio*), da

un momento cioè nel quale Dante crede alla continuità fra mondo classico e mondo cristiano; a una fase per così dire 'agostiniana' (rappresentata dall'enciclopedia poetica della *Commedia*), a un momento cioè nel quale Dante si rende conto dello sbarramento esistente fra mondo classico e mondo cristiano (significato dall'Incarnazione), e vede di conseguenza il rapporto fra mondo classico e mondo cristiano in termini di discontinuità e frattura. Se nel *Convivio* l'*Eneide* viene considerata alla stregua delle "scritture" sacre, e Virgilio alla stregua dei profeti del Vecchio Testamento, nella *Commedia* invece l'*Eneide* è la premonizione di una verità che va glossata, l'annuncio di un senso cristiano che va integrato (come dimostrato dall'episodio di Stazio), così come Virgilio è l'*auctor* della *tragedia* per eccellenza dell'Antichità, dell'opera cioè che affabula non la conclusione positiva dell'*iter* conoscitivo dell'uomo (come appunto la *Comedia* dantesca), ma la conclusione negativa. Né Virgilio né Enea furono infatti liberati dal Limbo, al momento del *descensus* di Cristo nell'Inferno. Anzi, la ripetizione poetica di tale *descensus*, il poema sacro, accerta la liberazione dell'anti-Enea, di Rifeo, e l'incoronazione dell'anti-Virgilio, di Dante.

Anche sul conto di Rifeo la *Commedia* intende apporre la glossa definitiva; tanto più memorabile quanto più essa è nascosta e imprevedibile:

Chi crederebbe giù nel mondo errante  
che Rifèo Troiano in questo tondo  
fosse la quinta de le luci sante?

Ora conosce assai di quel che 'l mondo  
veder non può de la divina grazia,  
ben che sua vista non discerna il fondo.

(67-72)

L'interrogazione iniziale che troviamo nella sestina dedicata alla presentazione di Rifeo, semplice comparsa nell'*Eneide*, serve sí ad enfatizzare il senso di stupita meraviglia che suscita la lieta novella della sua salvezza nel lettore cristiano, ma vuole soprattutto accentuare la straordinaria *novitas* del messaggio poetico dantesco, che corregge in modo tanto rivoluzionario il testo virgiliano. Nel secondo libro dell'*Eneide* troviamo Rifeo fra i compagni più valorosi di Enea che tentano di opporre un'ultima disperata difesa contro la forza soverchiante dei Greci; finché lo vediamo cadere soprafatto dai nemici:

“cadit et Rhiphaeus, iustissimus unus / qui fuit in Teucris et servantissimus aequi / (dis aliter visum)” (426–8); mentre d’altro canto Enea è destinato a uscire vivo dalla battaglia: “Danaum et, si fata fuissent / ut caderem, meruisse manu” (434–5). La documentazione dantesca per quanto riguarda la *factio*, il livello istoriale dell’episodio, è tutta ricavata da questi pochi versi virgiliani. Sulla base di tale *auctoritas*, Dante assume Rifeo a prototipo della giustizia umana; partendo cioè dall’affermata presenza in lui, al grado superlativo (“iustissimus”), della stessa virtù che caratterizza il suo compagno più fortunato, Enea; presenza che assume i toni del rito religioso (“servantissimus aequi”). Del tutto nuova è invece la glossa che Dante appone alla *littera* del poema classico. L’elaborazione della *sententia*, del senso allegorico, non trova infatti nessun avallo nella lettura secolare di Virgilio, nei commenti cioè e nelle glosse medievali. La storia della *conversio* di Rifeo, affabulata nel secondo discorso dell’aquila, ci viene presentata nel silenzio totale dell’esegesi cristiana:

L'altra, per grazia che da sí profonda  
fontana stilla, che mai creatura  
non pinse l'occhio infino a la prima onda,  
tutto suo amor là giù pose a drittura:  
per che, di grazia in grazia, Dio li aperse  
l'occhio a la nostra redenzion futura;  
ond' ei credette in quella, e non sofferse  
da indi il puzzo più del paganesmo;  
e riprendiene le genti perverse.  
Quelle tre donne li fur per battesimo  
che tu vedesti da la destra rota,  
dinanzi al battezzar più d'un millesmo.

(118–29)

Mentre al livello della costruzione narrativa dell’episodio Dante si attiene scrupolosamente alle informazioni che gli provengono dal testo classico, al livello della costruzione allegorica procede ad una radicale correzione dello stesso testo. Dall’*imitatio* passa all’*aemulatio*. L’intervento correttorio tocca in particolare l’inciso del testo di partenza: “Dis aliter visum.” Mentre infatti Virgilio riconosce nella morte di Rifeo, e nella sua conseguente esclusione dal viaggio fatale di Enea verso Roma, una decisione avversa degli dei; Dante attribuisce a quella stessa morte un significato positivo, interpretandola come il passaggio verso la vera patria, verso la cittadinanza

paradisiaca. La *comedia* cristiana diventa così l'inveramento della *tragedia* classica; e al tempo stesso il viaggio dell'*actor* fino alla visione finale di Dio si pone in una relazione di differenziazione rispetto al viaggio di Enea verso la Roma terrena (la città "dove Cristo tutto di si merca"), e in rapporto di identificazione rispetto alla *peregrinatio* di Rifeo verso "quella Roma onde Cristo è romano." La creazione del nuovo mito di Rifeo assumerà allora il valore non di un postremo omaggio alla poesia di Virgilio (come suona il commento tradizionale), ma della resa finale dei conti poetici fra *Eneide* e *Commedia*.

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#### NOTE

- \* Testo di una *lectura* tenuta a Napoli il 3 febbraio 1988 nel contesto della *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana* diretta da Pompeo Giannantonio.
- 1 Sul significato della figurazione dell'aquila nella *Commedia* (simbolo non solo dell'impero, ma anche dell'"altezza d'ingegno" del poeta-pellegrino) si veda ora Brugnoli 169-86.
- 2 Delle non numerose interpretazioni di questo canto si sono soprattutto tenute presenti nella nostra *lectura* quelle di Paratore e di Pézard. Spunti interessanti si trovano nei cappelli introduttivi dei commenti di Bosco-Reggio e di Pasquini-Quaglio.
- 3 Su questo punto si veda Paratore 293-4.
- 4 Per un'analisi complessiva del canone dei principi giusti si può ricorrere al lavoro di Renaudet 202-20.
- 5 Si noti l'eco intratestuale dell'analogia operazione compiuta dal Veltro, ma in senso negativo: "questi la caccerà per ogni villa" (*Inf.* 1.109).
- 6 Sul valore di questa distinzione si può ora consultare il lavoro di Minnis, soprattutto 103-12.
- 7 Si veda l'"Introduzione alla *Monarchia* di Dante," ora inclusa come prefazione al testo contenuto nel secondo tomo delle *Opere minori* di Dante, 241-69.
- 8 *Testi fiorentini del Dugento* 93.
- 9 Per questa complessa e dibattuta questione si rinvia il lettore alla convincente trattazione fornita da Foster 156-253.
- 10 Sulla diffusione della figura di Traiano nella cultura medievale verte l'ottimo lavoro di Whatley. Si vedano ora anche le pagine di Vickers.
- 11 Whatley 27-31.
- 12 *Patrologia latina* 75: 105-6.
- 13 Whatley 31-6.
- 14 *Policraticus* 5.8: p. 315 nell'edizione a cura di Webb.

- 15 Whatley 36–43.
- 16 Si tratta della *Quaestio* 71 (“Utrum suffragia prosint existentibus in inferno”), a.15, del *Supplementum* alla *Tertia Pars*.
- 17 *Fiori e vita di filosafi* 33–9.
- 18 Per l'interpretazione di questa novella si vedano Mulas e Paoletta 121–5.
- 19 Per questa prospettiva ermeneutica si rinvia a Freccero.
- 20 Su Rifeo, oltre alla bibliografia citata nella nota 2, si può vedere la voce dell'*Enciclopedia dantesca*, firmata da Giorgio Padoan.

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## *Paradiso* 28

Fra i lettori di "poesia" della *Commedia* il canto 28 del *Paradiso* non ha goduto buona fama nei tempi moderni. Valga per tutti la valutazione che nel 1921, anno fatidico di dicotomie drammaticamente alternative per la *Commedia*, ne forniva Giuseppe Vandelli: "Il canto è prevalentemente didattico; e ciò di cui per bocca di Beatrice il Poeta ci vuole ammaestrare sono dottrine teologico-cosmogoniche; . . . l'arte e la poesia si possono dire sopraffatte. Lo vela quasi tutto come una opaca tinta grigia, rotta appena qua e là da improvvisi bagliori di vivida luce, da linee o macchie di colore più acceso: è la poesia che, frenata e compressa, tratto tratto prorompe, perché il poeta col suo meraviglioso inestinguibile potere doma la rude materia e la costringe, per quanto sorda e riluttante, a rispondere" (570-71). Nel '57 Natalino Sapegno mediava la situazione evitando di puntare così perentoriamente sui "bagliori di vivida luce": così vedeva nei canti 28 e 29 "le successive fasi di un unico processo di approfondimento, sentito come un'esperienza viva, come una profonda emozione che arricchisce ed esalta lo spirito, dilatando miracolosamente i confini della sua potenzialità intellettuale e sensibile. Pur con bruschi salti di tono e pause opache, che s'alternano a pagine di altissima poesia metafisica, questi due canti sugli angeli costituiscono un solenne e grandioso preludio alla rappresentazione finale dell'Empireo" (343). La formula, "altissima poesia metafisica," è anche, se non m'inganno, un tentativo di uscire dal cerchio soffocante della collana di liriche. Ma, forse, troppo timidamente, sicché i lettori venuti dopo hanno dovuto mirare ad altro di più decisivo. Gianfranco Contini, verificato che "il canto è di quelli proverbialmente teologici piuttosto sopportati che ammirati dagli specialisti, i quali ritagliano la poesia con forbici non troppo complimentose e sono dispostissimi a biasimare la futilità ideologica (quasi che secoli molto più recenti non avessero seguitato a contribuire brillantemente alla dottrina sugli angeli, per esempio nella *Teosofia* rosminiana)," in una pervicace esplorazione delle concordanze presenti nel canto, si proponeva di dedicare ad esso "un'attenzione al significante non

tarpatà dall'attenzione al significato" (191). Ne dava così una lettura basata sulla parola "vero" e finiva col trasferire l'attenzione altrove, "alla domanda di che cosa sia la verità per Dante" (198). Canto dottrinale, dunque, tanto ch'esso fornisce chiavi adatte ad aprir l'uscio della dottrina di Dante, che proprio qui "appare uomo più di temi che di tesi" (198), in una tradizione sofistica e scolastica che ricercava il sapere nel verbo, nella parola, nel discorso insomma: di qui l'esame linguistico che Contini conduce e che si costituisce come una stratificazione interpretativa ormai indispensabile. Ma riconosciuta la portata dottrinale che accantona come improponibili per sommarietà dicotomie arbitrarie di poesia e non-poesia, altri spazi di indagine si propongono come ha provato Giorgio Padoan che, a conclusione d'una sua "lettura," ha affermato: "Occorre ribadire, e con estrema fermezza, che un tale metro di valutazione, almeno per quel che riguarda il poema dantesco, è totalmente inadeguato e porta inevitabilmente a conclusioni errate; occorre insomma avere il coraggio di dire che la formula che vuol ridurre la *Divina Commedia* a 'romanzo teologico' costituisce un grosso e pericoloso equivoco da liquidare una volta per tutte, e una volta per tutte finirla con le discettazioni, più o meno sottili, sulla presunta antinomia di 'struttura' teologica e di 'poesia' che fiorisce su quella struttura, e nonostante essa" (186-87). La sua convinzione è che la stessa formula del *Theologus Dantes*, avanzata fin da Giovanni del Virgilio, è da calcolare attentamente quanto al senso, "perché Dante non narra un viaggio intellettuale, un teologico *itinerarium mentis in Deum*; e a ragion veduta l'*Epistola a Cangrande* può affermare: 'Genus vero phylosophie, sub quo hic in toto et parte proceditur, est morale negotium, sive ethica; quia non ad speculandum, sed ad opus inventum est totum et pars. Nam si in aliquo loco vel passu pertractatur ad modum speculativi negotii, hoc non est gratia speculativi negotii, sed gratia operis; quia, ut ait Phylosophus in secundo Metaphysicorum, 'ad aliquid et nunc speculantur practici aliquando' ' (*Epist.* 13.40-41). Il viaggio che Dante narra è presentato come viaggio realmente avvenuto, e le tappe dell'avvicinamento a Dio, che è un punto metafisico, sono segnate da gradualì conquiste di conoscenza, per le quali di volta in volta più l'Alighieri può appercepire della grazia: fino alla visione di Dio, quel Dio che è perfetta Verità. Queste gradualì conquiste non sono frutto della speculazione dell'autore ma delle ri-



velazioni offertegli, per speciale grazia divina, da anime beate, il cui aiuto è indispensabile a Dante per intendere le 'secrete cose,' alcune raggiunte o raggiungibili dall'intelletto umano, altre ancora incerte o al di là delle possibilità umane di conoscenza razionale" (Padoan 188).

Certo, il viaggio di Dante "non est gratia speculativi negotii, sed gratia operis" (non è atto intellettuale, ma fatto). Senonché l'*Itinerarium mentis in Deum* è proprio questo stesso concetto, non operazione astratta dell'intelletto, ma atto di conoscenza, che è nella terminologia bonaventuriana cointuizione di Dio, non più quindi di dominio della filosofia ma della mistica. Finora Dante ha ricevuto delle spiegazioni filosofiche ogni volta che occorre, cioè sul ritmo delle fasi dell'acquisizione di conoscenza che il viaggio comporta e che concretamente narra. Non si tratta di un viaggio verso la conoscenza, ad Deum, ma nella conoscenza, in Deum. In ciò egli si muove sulla traccia di San Bonaventura: è ciò cui i critici, in particolare di questo canto e dei circostanti, non hanno badato abbastanza. Invece, in tutto il tracciato che Dante attua in questi canti si riconosce il percorso bonaventuriano dell'*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, che spiega anche in quale senso il viaggio dantesco è "realmente avvenuto," come dice Padoan. Lo si potrà constatare ripercorrendo, come si farà di seguito, l'ordine del canto. Ma intanto è indispensabile dare tutto il rilievo necessario come guida preliminare di lettura di questo canto al seguente luogo dell'*Itinerarium*, 7.1, che è il punto d'approdo dell'opera: "La mente ha cointuito Dio fuori di sè attraverso le sue orme e nelle sue orme, dentro di sè attraverso l'immagine e nell'immagine; sopra di sè attraverso la similitudine della luce divina che riluce sopra di noi e nella stessa luce, per quanto è possibile nelle condizioni di uomini in cammino" (Bonaventura 119). Un commento pertinente e illuminante al momento centrale di questo passo bonaventuriano lo ha fornito Silvana Martignoni: "L'itinerario della mente in Dio attraverso i vari gradi, va inteso non tanto come un progressivo allontanamento dalla realtà creata che va in certo modo abbandonata per poter pervenire a Dio, ma come un mettersi in cammino disposti a vedere in ogni grado della realtà creata un segno di Dio, cioè disposti a cointuirlo in ogni creatura" (15). Non è dunque col distacco dalle cose, dal materiale, da quanto è più lontano da Dio, che si compie il viaggio verso di lui, ma è nel prendere atto che in ogni attimo del viaggio e in ogni cosa

che per esso si incontra si compie una conoscenza di Dio. Fin dal principio dell'*Itinerarium* San Bonaventura ha nitidamente nella mente questa realtà conoscenziale: "Possiamo contemplare Dio non solo *fuori di noi e dentro di noi*, ma anche *sopra di noi*; *fuori di noi* attraverso l'orma, *in noi* attraverso la sua immagine, *sopra di noi* per la luce impressa nella nostra mente" (103); scrive, infatti, in 5.1, verso la conclusione dell'opera, come si è visto poco fa, e a conferma di quanto ha annotato in 1.2: "Nella nostra situazione attuale, tutto l'universo è scala per innalzarsi a Dio. Fra gli esseri creati alcuni sono *orma*, altre *immagini*; alcuni *corporei*, altri *spirituali*; alcuni *temporali*, altri *eterni*; alcuni *fuori di noi*, altri *dentro di noi*. Quindi per giungere al primo principio che è *spiritualissimo, eterno e sopra noi*, occorre passare attraverso l'orma che è corporea, temporale e fuori di noi: ci incamminiamo così nella via di Dio. E' necessario poi entrare nella nostra mente che è l'immagine di Dio eterna, spirituale e interiore e così *entriamo nella verità di Dio*. E' necessario infine, con lo sguardo rivolto al primo principio, elevarsi all'*Essere eterno, spiritualissimo e trascendente* e ciò significa *gioire nella conoscenza di Dio e nella venerazione della sua maestà*" (58-9). E' la prassi dell'ascesi, che realizza la percezione mistica di Dio attraverso gli aspetti dell'universo: ciò che può avvenire "come per mezzo di uno specchio" (*per speculum*) o "come nello specchio" (*in speculo*). *Specula* sono le creature attraverso le quali l'uomo conosce Dio o indirettamente (*per speculum*) o direttamente (*in speculo*). Proprio all'inizio di questo canto Dante materializza la metafora degli specchi: egli vede riflessa negli occhi di Beatrice un'immagine dell'universo per accertarsi della quale si volta a guardare:

come in lo specchio fiamma di doppiero  
vede colui che se n'alluma retro,  
prima che l'abbia in vista o in pensiero,  
e sé rivolge per veder se 'l vetro  
li dice il vero, e vede ch'el s'accorda  
con esso come nota con suo metro.

(4-9)

Questo movimento egli ha fermato nella memoria:

così la mia memoria si ricorda  
ch'io feci riguardando ne' belli occhi

onde a pigliarmi fece Amor la corda.

(10-12)

La memoria, che, spiega Bonaventura (*Itinerarium* 3.2) seguendo Agostino,<sup>1</sup> è una delle potenze della mente insieme all'intelligenza e alla volontà, presenta tre capacità: "La *prima* capacità della memoria, cioè quella di conservare e rendere presenti tutte le cose temporali, vale a dire le passate, le presenti e le future, offre l'*immagine* dell'eternità il cui presente indivisibile s'estende a tutti i tempi. La *seconda* capacità della memoria mostra che essa riceve gli oggetti non solo *dall'esterno* tramite le loro immagini, ma anche *dall'alto*, dal momento che riceve e conserva in sé principi semplici che non possono provenire dai sensi o dai fantasmi sensibili. La *terza* capacità della memoria mostra come questa abbia presente a sé una luce immutabile per la quale ricorda le immutabili verità" (85). Di ben altro che di quel movimento è dunque capace la memoria e lo si vedrà tra poco, alla descrizione del vero contenuto di essa. Non basta: Bonaventura (*Itinerarium* 3.3) rivela anche che, consistendo l'*operazione dell'intelletto* nella percezione dei *termini*, delle *proposizioni* e delle *conclusioni*, comprende i primi attraverso le definizioni della loro natura, "conosce il significato delle seconde quando sa con certezza che esse sono vere, e questo è autentico sapere perché questo modo di conoscere esclude ogni possibilità di errore" (87), e s'assicura delle conclusioni quando le riconosce derivate necessariamente dalle premesse. Non si tratta più d'una conoscenza intellettuale, ma d'una conoscenza superiore. Il luogo nel quale ogni possibilità di *speculativum negotium*, ovvero di filosofare, lascia il campo all'azione conoscitiva, ovvero alla mistica, è il canto 28 del *Paradiso*.

Il quale s'apre sul singolare spettacolo d'un universo rovesciato rispetto a quello del quale Dante ha fatto fino a questo punto esperienza percorrendolo. Egli, infatti, appena distolti gli occhi da Beatrice, ha la visione di un punto luminosissimo circondato da nove cerchi di fuoco: quel punto è Dio, quei cerchi o sfere sono i cieli ovvero i cori angelici:

E com'io mi rivolsi e furon tocchi  
li miei da ciò che pare in quel volume,  
quandunque nel suo giro ben s'adocchi,  
un punto vidi che raggiava lume

acuto sì, che'l viso ch'elli affoca  
 chiuder conviensi per lo forte acume;  
 distante intorno al punto un cerchio d'igne  
 sì girava sì ratto, ch'avria vinto  
 quel moto che più tosto il mondo cigne;  
 e questo era d'un altro circumcinto.

(11-18, 25-28)

Segue l'enumerazione, con scarsi incisi illustrativi, degli altri sette cerchi. Di questo rovesciamento di visione, che tanto più va sottolineata quando si richiama alla mente la visione avuta da Dante della terra nel canto 27,

Da l'ora ch'io avea guardato prima  
 i' vidi mosso me per tutto l'arco  
 che fa dal mezzo al fine il primo clima;  
 sì ch'io vedea di là da Gade il varco  
 folle d'Ulisse, e di qua presso il lito  
 nel qual si fece Europa dolce carco.  
 E più mi fora scoperto il sito  
 di questa aiuola; ma 'l sol procedea  
 sotto i mie' piedi un segno e più partito.

(79-87)

Ho sottolineato altrove l'alto simbolismo pienamente inerente alla concezione stessa del viaggio e a quella parallela dell'*itinerarium* (Scrivano 57-71). Ora intanto va aggiunto che nell'attivo e costante rapporto tra *opus theologicum* e *opus rethoricum* questa così singolare apertura in visione concreta i rispettivi punti d'approdo del viaggio e dell'*itinerarium*: nell'ordine del viaggio Dante penetra nel primo mobile di cui ha avuto un'illustrazione funzionale, e dunque la chiave del significato intellettuale ai versi 106-120 del canto precedente:

"La natura del mondo, che quieta  
 il mezzo e tutto l'altro intorno move,  
 quinci comincia come da sua meta;  
 e questo cielo non ha altro dove  
 che la mente divina, in che s'accende  
 l'amor che 'l volge e la virtù ch'ei piove.  
 Luce e amor d'un cerchio lui comprende,  
 sì come questo li altri; e quel precinto  
 colui che 'l cinge solamente intende.  
 Non è suo moto per altro distinto,  
 ma li altri son mensurati da questo,

sì come diece da mezzo e da quinto;  
 e come il tempo tegna in cotal testo  
 le sue radici e ne li altri le fronde,  
 omai a te può esser manifesto.

(Par. 27.106–120)

Ora di tutto questo si ha un rapido, contenuto riassunto:

. . . “Da quel punto  
 dipende il cielo e tutta la natura.  
 Mira quel cerchio che più li è congiunto;  
 e sappi che 'l suo muovere è sì tosto  
 per l'affocato amore ond'elli è punto.”

(Par. 28.41–45)

Dove va ribadita cosa che del resto nessun commentatore s'è lasciata sfuggire, che cioè la definizione del punto che è Dio è la traduzione quasi letterale di un luogo di Aristotele (*Metaph.* 12.30.7): “ex tali igitur principio dependet caelum et natura . . . hoc enim est Deus.” La notazione, che può apparire marginale, semplicemente dotta, appare altrimenti motivata quando si rifletta sul fatto che Dante qui, in questo gruppo di canti, segue generalmente con Bonaventura un tracciato agostiniano, lontano quindi ma non dimentico della tradizione aristotelico-tomistica. Nell'ordine dell'*itinerarium* Dante concreta la visione mistica dell'universo.

Che questo rovesciamento lo lasci sorpreso è il meno che ci si possa attendere.<sup>2</sup> E certo se il lettore, che è con Dante un viaggiatore simbolico attraverso il poema sacro, avesse dei dubbi, Dante stesso provvede subito a chiarire ogni equivoco, con la domanda interamente esplicitata da lui a Beatrice ai versi 46–57:

. . . “Se 'l mondo fosse posto  
 con l'ordine ch'io veggio in quelle rote,  
 sazio m'avrebbe ciò che m'è proposto;  
 ma nel mondo sensibile si puote  
 veder le volte tanto più divine,  
 quant'elle son dal centro più remote.  
 Onde, se 'l mio disir dee aver fine  
 in questo miro e angelico templo  
 che solo amore e luce ha per confine,  
 udir convenmi ancor come l'esempio  
 e l'esemplare non vanno d'un modo,  
 ché io per me indarno a ciò contemplo.”

Questa ampia esplicitazione è insolita ormai: si sa troppo bene che Beatrice intuisce in Dio con assoluta immediatezza ogni minimo pensiero, dubbio, perplessità del suo discepolo. Anche qui, prima ai versi 40-41, "la donna mia, che mi vedea in cura / Forte sospeso, disse," poi ai versi 97-98, "E quella che vedea i pensier dubi / Ne la mia mente, disse," questa attitudine di Beatrice è opportunamente confermata. Se la domanda merita pertanto una così particolare esplicitazione, chiaro è che deve rivestire a giudizio di Dante singolare importanza. Si può, allora, cercarne utilmente il perché.

Chiede dunque Dante come si accordi l'esperienza appena conseguita circa la distribuzione del cosmo, dove "si puote Veder le volte [ovvero le sfere] tanto più divine, / Quant'elle son dal centro [dell'universo] più remote," con la visione avuta ora delle sfere che si ampliano e ruotano gradualmente meno veloci a cominciare dal punto luminoso che è Dio. La percezione del paradiso è avvenuta da subito nella sostanza della luce, che prendeva di volta in volta le forme adatte alla capacità di Dante di decifrare, in un'operazione intellettuale-sensibile, le verità e gli oggetti d'essa che veniva incontrando. E', questa concezione, derivazione della teoria agostiniana dell'illuminazione, qui confermata nella definizione del paradiso come "miro e angelico templo / Che solo amore e luce ha per confine."<sup>3</sup> L'ambito bonaventuriano è già segnalato da questo dato; ma quello che segue lo conferma anche meglio e più a fondo. La terzina (55-57),

udir convienmi ancor come l'esempio  
e l'esemplare non vanno d'un modo,  
ché io per me indarno a ciò contemplo,

ha lasciato molti commentatori incerti, tanto che Bosco-Reggio l'hanno annotata così: "come la copia (il mondo sensibile, fisico) e il modello (il mondo sovrasensibile) non si comportino allo stesso modo, cioè si differenzino tra loro. E' una variazione chiasmatica di ciò che è detto in *Pd* XXVII 112 dell'Empireo rispetto al Primo Mobile: 'Luce e amore d'un cerchio lui comprende' (Contini). Non abbiamo posto a fianco di 'modello' e di 'copia' le corrispondenti parole del testo (*esempio*, *esemplare*), perché, nonostante che il senso non cambi invertendo i due termini, non c'è accordo tra i critici sul valore dei due sostantivi. Tra gli antichi prevale l'interpretazione di *esempio* come 'copia,' cioè il mondo fisico, e per consequen-

za *esemplare* vale 'modello,' il **mondo** sovransensibile. Molti tra i moderni invertono il significato, tanto che il Porena propone invece di *esemplare* la lezione *esemplato* presente in *Cv* III vi 6; ma tale lezione è troppo poco testimoniata. Conviene forse attenersi, anche per l'interpretazione, agli antichi commentatori" (464–65). Gli antichi commentatori infatti non avevano dubbi. Così il Buti annota: "l'*esempio*: cioè lo mondo di giuso, / sensibile; e l'*esemplare*: cioè lo mondo intelligibile, che è forma del mondo sensibile" (742); d'accordo con lui Benvenuto, che a proposito di "a ciò contemplo" (v. 57) annota: "Quasi dicat: mea speculatio non sufficit ad videndum et cognoscendum hoc" (413). Sono termini assolutamente bonaventuriani, che mettono in luce che qui si tratta di conoscenza mistica e non intellettuale, filosofica. Anche l'incertezza tra *esemplo-esemplare* dipende dall'ignoranza della fonte dalla quale deriva il rapporto in questione. Più decisamente di Bosco-Reggio, anche Sapegno sostiene che, invertendo i riferimenti dei termini (*esemplo* come modello; *esemplare* come copia), "il senso non cambia," avvertendo però che il concetto è quello platonico secondo cui "il mondo creato si modella sul prototipo esistente nella mente di Dio; e, in particolare, i cieli materiali ricevono la loro immagine e il loro suggello dalle intelligenze angeliche che li governano" (247). Sicché il senso cambia, in realtà, di molto, perché l'uno esclude quel fondo platonico-neoplatonico-agostiniano che non solo resta invece in gioco, ma dà senso all'opposizione dei due termini e al brano. Anche in questo caso solo il riconoscimento della fonte da cui Dante muove nell'uso dei termini, con sue aggiunte e varianti, può chiarire il problema. La fonte è il seguente passo dell'*Itinerarium* bonaventuriano, 2.11: "tutte le creature di questo mondo portano l'anima del contemplante e del sapiente a Dio, poiché esse sono *ombre, risonanze, pitture* di quel primo Principio sommamente potente, sapiente e buono; di quella eterna fonte, luce, pienezza, causa efficiente, esemplare, ordinatrice; esse sono *orme, immagini, spettacoli e segni* divinamente dati e proposti ai nostri occhi perché possiamo cointuire Dio. Sono, dicevo, *esemplari* o meglio *esempi* posti dinanzi alle menti ancora rozze e irretite dai sensi per innalzarle dalle cose sensibili che vedono, alle intelligibili che non vedono, come dal segno si giunge alla cosa significata" (80–81).

Nel passo la parola forte è *esemplare*, *exemplar*, che per San Bo-

naventura ha una duplicità di significato a seconda se sia inteso in senso attivo o passivo. Egli spiega la cosa in due luoghi della *Sententiarum Expositio*, in modo che l'uno sorregga e completi l'altro. Dice in uno: "per modum exemplaritatis est procedere dupliciter. Uno modo sicut exemplatum proprie; et sic creatura procedit a Deo tamquam exemplatum ab exemplari, et sic exemplar importat causalitatem formalem respectu exemplati" (*In I Sententiarum*, d. 6, a. un., q. 3); e nell'altro: "sicut exemplar secundum proprietatem vocabuli dicit expressionem per modum activi—unde exemplar dicitur ad cuius imitationem fit aliquid—sic e contrario imago per modum passivi; et dicitur imago quod alterum exprimit et imitatur" (d. 31, p. 2, a. 1, q. 1). La Martignoni, a commento complessivo della dottrina esemplaristica di Bonaventura estesa all'intero rapporto tra Dio e le creature, osserva: "Tutto il creato, proprio perché costituito di *exemplaria* espressivi, a vari livelli, dell'unica causa esemplare, rimanda continuamente ad Essa; tale rimando è insieme sollecitazione a risalire da ogni segno alla cosa significata. A questo contesto deve essere riferito anche il termine bonaventuriano di *cointuitio*. Ogni cosa è segno divinamente dato perché possiamo cointuire Dio, afferma S. Bonaventura. E cointuire significa riconoscere ogni realtà nel suo valore allusivo. Infatti nel momento in cui la mente vede la realtà creata come *exemplar* riconosce Dio come *Exemplar* eterno; e in questo atto con cui riconosce e riferisce, realizza il proprio *ascensus*; quest'ultimo non sarà quindi un evadere dal mondo, ma un coglierlo in quel Fondamento che gli garantisce un significato" (13).

Dante, che sta seguendo passo passo il processo bonaventuriano dell'*ascensus*, asceti, in una prospettiva di conoscenza non più filosofica ma mistica dell'universo, accoglie l'accezione che in essa si contempla per *exemplar*, "esemplare." Ma invece di opporre ad essa *exemplatum* o *imago*, adotta il termine "esempio," *exemplum*, che è di comune uso e quindi meglio comprensibile ai lettori di poesia volgare che stanno compiendo l'esperienza del viaggio-*itinerarium in Deum* attraverso la *Commedia*. La risposta di Beatrice è del resto semplicissima, come Dante stesso fa riconoscere e sottolinea appena l'ha ricevuta. Essa spiega che i cerchi che sono anche corpi, appartenenti dunque ancora al mondo del sensibile, sono tanto più ricchi di virtù quanto più sono grandi, perché in quella dimensione



grandezza è virtù; ma là dove la virtù si esprime per sé (*in speculo*) non attraverso la “parvenza delle sostanze” (*per speculum*), non v'è questione di grandezza. Misurando dunque solo in base alla virtù, si capisce che alla prima delle sfere che nell'*esemplare* ruotano intorno al punto luminoso ed è la più piccola corrisponde nell'*esempio* dato dal cosmo percorribile la sfera di maggior grandezza e così via per ogni cielo. Naturalmente ne consegue che ciò che conta sono le intelligenze motrici di ciascuna sfera, perché ciascuna di esse rappresenta una virtù, essendo *esempio* di quell'*esemplare* che è in Dio. Ponendo la sua domanda sulla dicotomia “esempio-esemplare” Dante ha già mostrato un'intuizione della diversa dimensione in cui si muove, che è quella mistica, non la filosofica: e nella mistica il suo maestro, o almeno la sua fonte è Bonaventura, rispetto al quale egli spiega facilitando e puntando sull'essenziale. Così Dio è *esemplare* primo; i cieli, o cori che lo circondano sono *esemplari* in quanto traggono da Dio la loro esemplarità e in quanto sono modelli degli *esempi* che sono i “cerchi corporai.” Così come tutto nell'universo è orma, immagine, spettacolo, segno per cointuire Dio.

Ma Dante esprime poi distesamente la sua intelligenza della risposta di Beatrice, facile solo in quanto si configura come conseguenza di un suo adeguamento sempre più profondo e attivo alla costituzione dell'universo. E' questo l'atto mistico, che conduce al riconoscimento del vero: i versi 79–87 esprimono questa gioia della comprensione con mezzi adatti alla mente umana, cioè con la similitudine nella quale trovano luogo elementi mitologico-figurativi ben tradizionali:

Come rimane splendido e sereno  
l'emisperio dell'aere, quando soffia  
Borea da quella guancia ond'è più leno,  
per che si purga e risolve la roffia  
che pria turbava, sì che 'l ciel ne ride  
con le bellezze d'ogne sua paroffia;  
così fec'io, poi che mi provide  
la donna mia del suo risponder chiaro,  
e come stella in cielo il ver si vide.

Il momento rilevante dell'espressione di questa piena intelligenza della risposta di Beatrice s'annida nelle tre terzine seguenti, dove alle teorie agostiniane-bonaventuriane si associano, in una tipica sintesi di sapere medievale, altre suggestioni e teorie. In primo luogo

la nozione della consustanzialità del verbo divino, che è la verità espressa, e dell'universo, che è la verità attuata. Per questo alle parole di Beatrice tutti i cerchi "sfavillano" in modo che ogni singola scintilla, ovvero ogni angelo, esprime tutto l'incendio, ovvero la cresciuta luminosità del cosmo sotto forma dell'*esemplare* che è la visione ricevuta da Dante e cui s'accompagna l'"osannar":

E poi che le parole sue restaro,  
non altrimenti ferro disfavilla  
che bolle, come i cerchi sfavillaro.

L'incendio suo seguiva ogni scintilla;  
ed eran tante, che 'l numero loro  
più che 'l doppiar de li scacchi s'inmilla.

Io sentiva osannar di coro in coro  
al punto fisso che li tiene a li *ubi*,  
e terrà sempre, ne' quai sempre fuoro.

(88-96)

Sono versi di complesse e intricate stratificazioni, dal livello del significante fino alla più alta articolazione retorica. In 88-90 la similitudine tra il ferro incandescente e lo sfavillio dei cerchi è già offerta in una forma concentrata e con l'uso di un curioso anacoluto dopo la temporale d'apertura. E le varianti nel significante "disfavilla-sfavillaro" non lo sono nel significato. Il verso 91 è fondato sulla produzione metonimica dell'oggetto ("incendio suo" nel senso di cerchio luminoso) dal soggetto, "scintilla," che è metafora di angelo. Le scintille/angeli sono poi numerate con allusione ad un motivo, quello del moltiplicarsi verso un numero di enorme ordine di grandezza risultante dal raddoppio in progressione geometrica dell'uno per ognuna delle 64 caselle degli scacchi largamente presente nella tradizione lirica romanza.<sup>4</sup> L'osanna degli angeli infine si rivolge al "punto fisso," Dio, che li ha destinati ai loro luoghi ("*ubi*") da sempre e per sempre ("terrà sempre, sempre fuoro"). E' qui ripreso il tema del tempo, che, come è detto più ampiamente in *Par.* 27.118-120,

e come il tempo tegna in cotal testo  
le sue radici e ne li altri le fronde,  
omai a te può esser manifesto,

ha le sue radici nel primo mobile dal moto invisibile e le sue ramificazioni negli altri cieli, sul cui movimento si misura il tempo sulla terra. Il tema del tempo è quant'altri mai aggrovigliato, come ha mo-

strato Cesare Vasoli nella voce “Tempo” dell’*Enciclopedia dantesca*. Qui Dante si attiene alla concezione aristotelica già esposta in *Conv.* 4.2.6 (“lo tempo, secondo che dice Aristotile nel quarto de la Fisica, è ‘numero di movimento celestiale,’ lo quale dispone le cose di qua giù diversamente a ricevere alcuna informazione”), condotta da Aristotele alla conclusione che esiste “un tempo più grande di tutto ciò che è nel tempo . . . Tutte le cose suscettibili di generazione e di corruzione sono nel tempo; laddove, invece, restano al di fuori di esso ‘tutte le cose che sono sempre’ e la cui essenza, ‘non misurata dal tempo,’ non è suscettibile di mutamento” (Vasoli 547). Tuttavia neppur qui manca uno spunto che può risultare bonaventuriano. San Tommaso, infatti, aveva sostenuto che, “in pura linea logica, non è escluso che il tempo e il movimento siano infiniti, almeno nel senso che non abbiano un ‘principio’ ” (Vasoli 547). Bonaventura aveva ritenuto questa tesi contraddittoria in quanto tale concetto di infinito implicherebbe un accrescersi indefinito del tempo. Sulla questione qui non si può che rinviare alla rassegna minuziosissima di luoghi proposta da Vasoli. Nel presente contesto, di là dalla considerazione circa una nozione del sapere come sintesi di tutti i saperi e di tutte le dottrine, è relativamente importante l’aggancio bonaventuriano secondo cui il tempo è contenuto dall’eternità, che è anche la concezione espressa da Dante.

Si è giunti così alla parte finale del canto. Al verso 98 Beatrice, senza più attendere la domanda di Dante, avvia la trattazione della teoria degli angeli, che si protrarrà fino alla conclusione del canto. Che, va ribadito, si trova in un gruppo di canti che dal 27, dove è illustrata la natura del primo mobile, ma dall’esterno, si estende al 29, interamente angelologico e da vedere quindi in coppia con questo, specie per l’ultima parte, giungendo fino al 30, in cui si conclude con la rosa mistica l’intera successione di visioni e di connesse spiegazioni. Difficile fissare con certezza la divisione interna di questo 28, che Padoan (179), rispetto ai contenuti dottrinali che vi son trattati, ha visto distribuito in tre zone (visione, spiegazione, distribuzione dei cori angelici), e Contini (142) invece, in base alla parola-chiave “vero,” in quattro tempi o movimenti: nella diversità del punto di vista, tutto vero. Certo è che la ricerca della verità, oggettivata nell’ultima parte del canto dove si ristabilisce la reale distribuzione dei cori angelici nei diversi cieli sulla base del *De coelesti hierar-*

chia dello pseudo-Dionigi contro gli errori di Gregorio Magno, ha il suo momento più alto nella teorizzazione della simbologia universale derivata da San Bonaventura e concentrata nei primi due terzi del canto, dalla rovesciata visione del cosmo alla soddisfatta pace mistica di Dante. Non sarà dunque del tutto improponibile una più semplice strutturazione del canto in due parti, la prima compimento della dottrina esposta nel precedente, la seconda anticipo dell'angelologia del seguente.

La teoria angelologica in questa prima parte è fondata su due elementi: 1. reale successione dei corpi angelici; 2. raggruppamento di essi in terne. Cominciando dall'alto, ovvero dal cerchio più prossimo al punto luminoso, poiché Dante e Beatrice è a questo che guardano, la prima terna comprende Serafini, Cherubini, Troni. Circa questi ultimi un'anticipazione s'era data in *Par.* 9.61-62, dove erano indicati da Carlo Martello come la gerarchia angelica che presiede alla giustizia: uno di quei legami che rendono la *Commedia*, con i suoi fitti rinvii e agganci e richiami, un'unità compatta, segno della presenza divina, come l'universo stesso (Scrivano 64). I versi seguenti, 106-114, illustrano la condizione di felicità degli angeli dei primi tre cori, la identificano con la penetrazione nella verità "in che si queta ogni intelletto," cioè con la visione ("l'atto che vede"), cui segue ("seconda") l'amore e che è semplicemente effetto della grazia e della buona volontà di chi la riceve. Luogo importante anche questo, generalmente interpretato come adesione alla teoria secondo cui la via della beatitudine è quella razionale e non quella mistica, in quanto l'atto intellettuale precede e prevale sull'atto d'amore. Distinzione troppo secca, che oppone atto d'amore e atto intellettuale in modo non adeguato al testo, dove comprendere, capire è atto visivo, è la contemplazione della visione: ovvio, appena che si pensi come Dante abbia la mente rivolta alla visione che, per la prima volta, gli ha mostrato Dio sotto forma di punto luminoso. In *Par.* 33.82-87, sarà un atto di grazia divina quello che consente la visione diretta di Dio:

Oh abbondante grazia ond'io presunsi  
ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna,  
tanto che la veduta vi consunsi!

Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,  
legato con amore in un volume,  
ciò che per l'universo si squaderna.

La distinzione tra via razionale e via mistica è dunque da attenuare perché non l'intelletto consente la visione, ma la grazia divina. Anche qui è probabilmente assai vantaggioso riconoscere una presenza del testo bonaventuriano dell'*Itinerarium*, 7.1, dove si conclude l'illustrazione dei sei gradi dell'ascesi ed è raggiunta la cointuizione di Dio: "Le meditazioni precedenti sono state come i sei gradini del trono del vero Salomone per i quali si perviene a quello stato in cui la persona veramente pacifica si riposa nella quiete spirituale come nella Gerusalemme interiore. Sono state come le sei ali del Cherubino attraverso le quali la mente del vero contemplativo, illuminato completamente dalla luce della divina sapienza, può elevarsi . . . La mente ha cointuito Dio *fuori di sé, . . . dentro di sé, . . . sopra di sé*" (119). E in 7.5, si ribadisce: "Poiché per ottenere tutto questo niente può la natura e poco l'operosità, occorre dare scarsa importanza all'indagine e molto all'unzione; poca alla lingua, molto alla gioia intima; poca alla parola e allo scritto e molto al dono di Dio, cioè allo Spirito Santo" e infine in 7.6: "Se poi desideri sapere in che modo tutto ciò avvenga, interroga la grazia non la dottrina, il desiderio non l'intelletto . . ." (122-3). Per il che Dante e Bonaventura si valgono delle medesime fonti, che sono rispettivamente *La gerarchia celeste* per Dante e *La teologia mistica* per Bonaventura, ambedue del pseudo-Dionigi.<sup>5</sup>

La seconda terna dei cori, Dominazioni, Virtudi, Podestadi, che fiorisce anche quando la costellazione di Ariete è notturna, cioè compare di notte tra il 21 settembre e il 21 ottobre, canta il suo osanna a Dio con tre melodie come manifestazione di tre ordini di letizia. L'ultima terna comprende tripudianti Principati e Arcangeli, festanti gli Angeli. I versi finali, 130-139, che paiono aggiuntivi nella felice mossa di Gregorio che sorride del proprio errore appena, giunto nei cieli, riconosce la verità, è in realtà un'ulteriore testimonianza di verità, perché Dionigi ha solo esposto ciò che Paolo gli ha comunicato:

E se tanto secreto ver proferse  
mortale in terra, non voglio ch'ammiri:  
ché chi 'l vide qua sù gliel discoperse  
con altro assai del ver di questi giri.

Con altra angolazione il tema sarà ripreso in 29.85-126, nella condanna di Beatrice verso quei filosofi e predicatori che non si tengono

stretti alle *Scritture*, strumento concesso agli uomini per penetrare la verità, non dandosene altro che quello di constatare *de visu*, come per grazia divina può far Dante, che l'espone nel 'poema sacro,' continuazione delle *Scritture*. Ma per queste cose e tutta la materia angelologica il 28 si completa nel 29 con una continuata lettura, come quella condotta da Attilio Mellone.<sup>6</sup> Per ora, qui, basterà ricordare che questa materia angelologica si fonda su di un sincretismo che accoglie posizioni anche molto diverse e perfino singolari.<sup>7</sup>

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### NOTE

- 1 Agostino, *De trinitate* 14.8.2, "ergo mens meminit sui, intelligit se, diligit se."
- 2 Mellone, "Il primo mobile" 239: "Beatrice si lamenta che gli studiosi medievali non cercano di spiegare la discrepanza tra i nove cieli astronomici e i nove cori angelici: 'il nodo . . . tanto, per non tentar, è fatto sodo (v. 60).' Sfido io! I nove cerchi ignei erano un simbolo creato dalla fantasia di Dante, come rivelò S. Bersani, *Dottrine allegorie simboli della Divina Commedia*, Roma, 1931, p. 270."
- 3 Gilson 313, ripreso dagli altri studiosi e commentatori, sottolinea in proposito che l'*Itinerarium* s'apre con la citazione dell'*Epistola a S. Giacomo*, 1.17, "omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum desursum est, descendens a Patre luminum," e aggiunge che *Itinerarium*, *Reductio* e *Breviloquium* "sono interamente consacrati a commentarlo."
- 4 Bosco-Reggio 468, fanno riferimento a luoghi di Folchetto da Marsiglia, Peire Vidal, *Mare Amoro*so.
- 5 Bonaventura, dove si cita dalla *Teologia mistica* 1.1, di Dionigi Areopagita. Su cui Sciamannini 78-81.
- 6 In "Il primo mobile," ma anche "Il canto XXIX del *Paradiso*."
- 7 Le Goff 179-181, Yates 16-17, Scholem 128-129.

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# The Dartmouth Dante Project

Robert Hollander

## I. History of the Project

In June of 1982 I was teaching a course on Dante at Dartmouth College. Taking note of the fact that three of my colleagues there (Kevin Brownlee, Stephen Nichols, Nancy Vickers) were increasingly interested in dealing seriously with Dante in their scholarship and of the fact that Dartmouth's holdings in this area are not strong, I was struck by the idea that a computerized database of the commentaries would not only alleviate the situation of my colleagues at Dartmouth, but of *dantisti* everywhere. I have elsewhere characterized this notion as "the best simple idea I have ever had"—a statement which perhaps suggests inaccurately that I have had good complex ideas. Dartmouth, as many know, under the guidance of its president, John Kemeny, had become one of the campuses in the world most involved in making the computer serve all parts of its curriculum. It was—and is—a fertile soil for this project. By the end of August 1982 responses from my three colleagues in French & Italian, from the computer people (principally Raymond Neff, then Director of Academic Computing at the Kiewit Computational Center at Dartmouth), and from the Dartmouth administration were all encouraging enough to get the project started. In May of 1983 the Dante Society of America offered \$2000 in start-up funds; Dartmouth itself soon made available some \$20,000. Neff and the four humanists consulted through the following summer and produced an application to the National Endowment for the Humanities. This was successful. On 1 October 1984 the project began a more intense phase of its existence, supported by \$120,000 for that fiscal year (1984–85) and by the same amount for 1985–86 (in the form of \$60,000 raised by Dartmouth to match an offer of that same amount in "Gifts and Match" from NEH). In August of 1986 we learned that our second application to NEH had also been successful, this time in

the amount of \$150,000 of outright funds, with the potential to raise a second federal match of \$60,000 in non-federal funds. As of the end of 1987, gifts from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Apple Computer, Princeton University, and the AT & T Educational Foundation had brought us to that total. We still need to find ca. \$180,000 in order to complete our editing of the machine-readable texts.

During the academic year 1982–83 Raymond Neff and a team of six graduate students in computer science at Dartmouth put together a working prototype of the project, based on some two dozen commentaries to *Inferno* 5.121–138. In the summer of 1983 it was—when the user-interface was not *too* fragile—a joy to watch visiting firemen sit before a terminal in Kiewit Center and call up commentaries to a designated verse or search the tiny database by “key words,” or wonder if one of these commentators had thought of St. Augustine’s conversion in relation to Francesca’s being “converted” by her reading of the Lancelot romance to lustful passion (none had). The prototype had many problems, but did show us that these were worth resolving and were, indeed, resolvable.

Life generally contrives to make all plans seem contingent. Just as the project was moving into full-scale operation in the fall of 1984, Raymond Neff was lured from Dartmouth to Berkeley. William Arms, acting director of Kiewit Center, agreed to serve as acting co-director of the project, until he too was soon set upon by foreigners, this time in the form of Carnegie-Mellon. Since 1985 our co-director has been Donald Spicer, Director of Academic Computing at Dartmouth, who took the place previously occupied in the project by Neff and Arms. By 1988 Notre Dame had picked off Spicer; David Bantz, Dartmouth’s chief of humanistic computing, is now co-director. During the academic year 1984–85 Jeffrey Schnapp, then an assistant professor of French & Italian at Dartmouth, both a *dantista* and a highly “computer-literate” young scholar, became the administrator of the database. His efforts on behalf of the project were crucial; he single-handedly galvanized and co-ordinated the two dozen or so graduate and undergraduate students at Dartmouth who put data into the computer. He, too (need I tell it?) was soon to be wooed to California (Stanford). Janet Stephens, who had been trained by Schnapp, assumed this key position in September of 1985. She and a gradu-

ate student, Ty Cannon, were in charge of the day-to-day operation of the procedures of data entry during the academic year 1985–86. During the next year Jonathan Altman, a junior at Dartmouth, took on increasing responsibility, taking over Janet Stephens's tasks while she was in Italy during the fall of 1986. We have been extremely well served by this group of people and by various administrators, faculty, personnel at Kiewit Center, and students at Dartmouth College. The central players now seem to be in place for the life of the project. The two other key members of our staff are Margherita Frankel, formerly associate professor of Italian at New York University and a *dantista*, who is serving as editorial co-ordinator for the project (she has been part of our deliberations since July of 1983) and Stephen Campbell, a computer programmer, who has become the central figure on the computational side of the enterprise, in charge of the adaptation and development of the software which will power the manipulation of the database. The project now uses a VAX (Digital Equipment Company) 785 computer running the Unix (AT&T) timesharing system and a text retrieval database developed by BRS Information Systems.

The entering of the database, which, we estimate, will be the equivalent of some 150,000 typed pages, was, from the beginning, our principal concern. During the summer of 1983 Kiewit Center purchased a Kurzweil Data Entry Machine (henceforth the KDEM). This remarkable instrument allows itself to be programmed to "read" a given typeface or set of typefaces in a document. At first we had any number of problems with the KDEM. Its error-rate was sharply reduced once we offered it enlarged photocopy of smaller typefaces. This and other techniques which have been developed by Schnapp, Cannon, Stephens, and Campbell are now procuring results that more than justify the expense (ca. \$0.75 per page) of the KDEM operation. The KDEM's rate of accuracy, while it varies with the quality of text which we present it, is now ca. 99.9%. Editing is of course still necessary, but not overly difficult, especially because of the pre-editing techniques developed by Altman, Stephens, and Campbell. (The Digital Equipment Company has contributed equipment—seven work stations worth \$41,000—to the editorial phase of the project.) The text of all commentaries must be checked; some two dozen require the addition of verse numbers to the entries so that retrieval

throughout the database may be uniform. Nearly all of the commentaries are readable by the KDEM. However, we have found that some either have typefaces too difficult for consistent recognition of their characters or are in such poor condition (e.g., spotted pages, uneven inking) so that manual entry is necessary or at least more desirable. The positive side of this development is that we are proceeding with *two* modes of data entry, a fact which enables us to put in data more rapidly. The most difficult text we could find for the KDEM to "read" was that of Bernardino Daniello (first printed in 1568 and not reprinted in its entirety since then). This interesting Renaissance commentary has now been entered, by hand. The first printed by-product of the Dartmouth Dante Project, this text will be published within the year by University Press of New England. Schnapp and Hollander, with assistance from Vickers and Brownlee, added documentation to Daniello's citations of the Bible and of secular authors and have also produced an index of citations (computer-generated, I need hardly add).

As of August 1988 all but five commentaries are machine-readable. We expect that all sixty will be so before January 1989—see the Appendix, below, for particulars.

As is clear from the Appendix, we are ahead of schedule with the preparation of commentary copy (paste-ups for the KDEM or photocopy for those performing manual entry), with some 57 commentaries having been so prepared, and entered, and behind schedule in our editing (twenty-eight commentaries edited or currently being edited). This last activity has proven to be more time-consuming than we at first had estimated. We currently hope that arrangements made through the good offices of Professor Francesco Mazzoni, President of the Società Dantesca Italiana and holder of the senior chair in *filologia dantesca* at the University of Florence, will aid us considerably in editing computerized text. We also look forward to collaboration with Professor Antonio Zampolli, Director of the Istituto di Linguistica Computazionale (Pisa), as the project develops and finds interested users in Italy.

The extraordinarily generous response of Italian publishers holding copyright to commentaries not yet in the public domain must also be acknowledged. No major commentary which we wish to include will thus be excluded from the database. Eventual users will of

course be reminded that material protected by the International Copyright Convention is indeed still so protected. Nonetheless, individual users will have access to this material because of the enlightened and helpful response to our requests on the part of Italian publishers.

## II. Projected Uses of the Database

Once the project is completed, what will have been accomplished? And how will those who are interested in the database be able to consult it? *Dantisti* are aware that, before one ventures an opinion concerning a vexed passage, one should (or would like to) consult all previous opinions. Currently—and I speak of my own procedures in my own library's collection at Princeton—this initial effort takes roughly four days, divided as follows. Two days are necessary to collect and read through the five dozen commentaries in Firestone Library, two more to consult related bibliography (*lecturae* devoted to the canto in which the passage occurs, articles and books which the commentaries and the *lecturae* indicate as being germane). It should be added that what is described here is both the least complex and the most usual form of inquiry generated by the poem.

Our ability to complete successfully the first of these activities will now be greatly enhanced. For those who do not have access to a first-rate collection of commentaries (such as those at Cornell or Harvard) and who wish to consult widely in the commentary tradition, the Dartmouth Dante Project will become a necessity. On the other hand, those who do currently have recourse to the full run of printed commentaries will find that the computerized version has innumerable advantages. I illustrate some of these briefly.

- a) A student of the poem who thinks that he has come up with an interesting interpretation of a given verse will now be able to ask for a review of the commentary tradition in whatever order may be desired (e.g., chronological, reverse-chronological, or even "my-own-favored-dozen-in-the-order-I-happen-to-prefer").
- b) If a scholar believes he has discovered a "source" in Virgil, Ovid, the Bible, for a given verse, he may use the search routine indicated above. He may, alternatively or additionally, wish to search the database by "key words" in order to ascertain if any of the commentators have cited his passage before him. Such searches

require more skill on the part of the searcher, but can be extremely valuable.

- c) Let us assume that one is interested not so much in Dante as the rediscovery of Plato in the Renaissance. Searches of the early commentaries for crucial concepts or phrases can be completed in seconds or minutes, depending on the richness of the materials present and the ingenuity of the searcher.

Access to the database will be achieved in a number of ways. Indeed, given the nature of the awesome speed of technological developments, it would be rash to predict in exactly what ways. What follows moves from the simplest procedures to the seemingly incredible ones.

- a) retrieval possibilities in the immediate future (in all cases Dartmouth is to receive an as yet to be determined fair cost for computer time and handling of requests):
1. A print-out of a complete commentary (so long as that text is *not* protected by the copyright convention). Libraries or individuals wishing to fill gaps in their holdings will be able to create "instant books" should they wish to. And many of the earlier commentaries, originally printed without line references, will now have these indications—a considerable improvement.
  2. A print-out of a particular comment within a commentary (e.g., Daniello on *Inferno* 21.112) or of *all* commentators on that verse or passage.
  3. On-line consultation either at Dartmouth or via telephonic connection (modem). Such access allows the user full control of the search procedures and is, in most cases, to be preferred. (External users, in addition to Dartmouth's normal connection charge, will have to pay phone charges. Telenet charges between Princeton and Dartmouth currently cost about \$2.50 an hour.)
- b) additional possibilities for retrieval once the project is completed:
4. A library or an individual will be able to purchase a tape of the entire database from Dartmouth for a surprisingly low fee (in the hundreds of dollars?). However, the database will be available in this form *without* the BRS search software. Thus a potential purchaser will need to have access to appropriate

software at his own institution so that he will be able to interact with the database in efficient ways.

5. There is already available a laser disk (manufactured by SONY —Digital Equipment has already moved in the same direction, and others will also undoubtedly do so) which will run even now on an enhanced IBM-PC. This disk holds several times the information represented by our database. It thus seems reasonable to believe that individuals (not to mention research facilities) will be able to purchase the entire database, possibly enhanced by other texts, in a form that will run efficiently on a personal computer. It now seems almost a certainty that such will be the case well before we finish our work on the project.

### III. The User Interface

- 1) The Dartmouth Dante will be menu driven.
- 2) "Help" features will guide users through the entire procedure of consultation.
- 3) Indices and tables found in some commentaries will be preserved (e.g., Scartazzini uses abbreviations to refer to other critics and commentators).
- 4) Since all texts are keyed by cantica, canto, and line, orderly search procedures of the most usual kind are very easily accomplished.
- 5) The standard search procedures of BRS will power the basic system of text retrieval. One of the distinguishing features of BRS is that it enables "full text retrieval" without prior manipulation of the database by the user.

We are aware that full text retrieval requires more complicated effort than even skilled users are likely to realize. (See the article by David C. Blair and M. E. Maron in *Communications of the ACM* for March of 1985.) We have reason to believe that, for various reasons, users of this database will be able to do better than those in the experiment described by Blair and Maron. At the same time, we understand the importance of making available clear and complete instructions through "help menus" concerning the various combinations of Boolean logic incorporated in BRS.

### IV. Immediate plans.

Stephen Campbell's prototype made its debut at the Kalamazoo

Congress in May of 1987. We are now able to give interested *dantisti* here and abroad a more concrete sense of what the end result of our labors will enable them to accomplish. (The prototype included some two dozen commentaries to the entirety of *Inferno* 5.) Once we are satisfied that the prototype has dealt effectively with the problems confronting us, we should soon be able to "load" all commentaries which have been through their final editorial procedures. In October of 1988 the Project will be able to enter the "real world" and to be consulted for whatever materials are currently available. Since these materials will by then encompass at least twenty full commentaries, the gains to Dante scholarship should be worth our efforts even then, while the rest of our work continues. Each person who consults the database will be reminded that any errors should be recorded (online users will be able to list these during a session), since we will re-open the database on 20 October 1990 for the first of our regular editorial revisions of the material.

Thus, while a great deal of work still lies before us, we can begin to see that one day in a not very distant future we will have finished a task which has cost many of us considerable effort and the citizens of this republic a great deal of money.

*Princeton University*

## APPENDIX

### Dartmouth Dante Project: Status of the Commentaries

(4 August 1988)

[This chart displays the 60 commentaries chosen for inclusion. The bibliographical data are drawn from the working document, "A Checklist of Commentators on the *Commedia*" prepared by Robert Hollander, now available in somewhat different form in *Dante Studies* 101 (1983 [1988]): 181–192. The first "tier" includes Italian commentaries written before 1900; the second, Latin commentaries; the third, English; the fourth, Italian commentaries of this century. (N.B. Dates of publication are not always more than approximate.) \*An asterisk which precedes the number of an item indicates that this text is fully prepared for use. This database will be opened on 8 October 1988.]



FIRST TIER (=earlier *Italian* commentaries)

- \*1. JACOPO ALIGHIERI (1322) (*Inferno* only)  
Text edited and in final form.
- \*2. JACOPO DELLA LANA (1324–28)  
Text edited and in final form.
- \*3. OTTIMO (1333)  
Text made available by Accademia della Crusca.
- \*4. ANONIMO SELMIANO (1337) (*Inferno* only)  
Text edited and in final form.
- \*5. GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO (1373) (*Inferno*: partial)  
Text edited and in final form.
- 6. FRANCESCO DA BUTI (1385)  
Text being edited.
- 7. ANONIMO FIORENTINO (1400)  
Text machine-readable, pre-edited but not yet edited.
- 8. GUINIFORTO DELLI BARGIGI (1440) (*Inferno* only)  
Text being entered.
- 9. CRISTOFORO LANDINO (1481)  
Text being edited.
- 10. ALESSANDRO VELLUTELLO (1544)  
Text being edited.
- \*11. BERNARDINO DANIELLO (1568)  
Text edited and in final form—printed edition expected shortly.
- 12. LODOVICO CASTELVETRO (1570) (*Inferno*: partial)  
Text being edited (expected 9/88).
- 13. POMPEO VENTURI (1732)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
- 14. BALDASSARE LOMBARDI (1791)  
Text being edited (expected 9/88).
- 15. LUIGI PORTIRELLI (1804)  
Text machine-readable, pre-edited but not yet edited.
- \*16. PAOLO COSTA (1819)  
Text edited and in final form.
- 17. ROSSETTI (1826) (*Inferno* & *Purgatorio*)  
Text ready for data entry.
- 18. NICCOLÒ TOMMASEO (1837)  
Text being edited (ready fall 1988).

19. RAFFAELLO ANDREOLI (1856)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
20. LUIGI BENNASSUTI (1864)  
No action taken as yet (last comm. in this list at this stage).
21. GREGORIO DI SIENA (1867) (*Inferno* only)  
Text being entered.
- \*22. BRUNONE BIANCHI (1868)  
Text edited and in final form.
23. G. A. SCARTAZZINI (1900 [1874])  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
24. GIUSEPPE CAMPI (1888)  
Text ready for data entry.
25. GIOACHINO BERTHIER (1892) (*Inferno* only)  
Text being entered.
26. GIACOMO POLETTTO (1894)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.

#### *SECOND TIER (Latin Commentators)*

27. GRAZIOLO DE' BAMBAGLIOLI (1324) (*Inferno* only)  
Text being edited (ready early 1989?).
28. ANONIMO LOMBARDO (1324?) (*Purgatorio* only)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
- \*29. GUIDO DA PISA (1327) (*Inferno* only)  
Text edited and in final form (as of 9/1/88).
- \*30. PIETRO DI DANTE (1340)  
Text edited and in final form.
31. CODICE CASSINESE (1350??)  
Text machine-readable, pre-edited, but not yet edited.
32. BENVENUTO DA IMOLA (1373)  
Text machine-readable and being edited (through *Inferno*).
- \*33. JOHANNIS DE SERRAVALLE (1416)  
Text edited and in final form (by 9/15/88).

#### *THIRD TIER (English Commentators)*

34. HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1867)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
35. H. OELSNER (1899)  
Text being entered.

36. H. F. TOZER (1901)  
Text being entered.
- \*37. JOHN RUSKIN (1903)  
Text edited and in final form.
38. J. S. CARROLL (1904)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
39. C. H. GRANDGENT (1909)  
Text machine-readable, pre-edited, but not yet edited.
40. CHARLES S. SINGLETON (1970)  
Text machine-readable, pre-edited, but not yet edited.

*FOURTH TIER (Modern Italian Commentators)*

41. FRANCESCO TORRACA (1905)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
42. CARLO STEINER (1921)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
43. ENRICO MESTICA (1921)  
Text machine-readable, being pre-edited, but not yet edited.
- \*44. CASINI/BARBI (1921)  
Text edited and in final form.
45. ISIDORO DEL LUNGO (1926)  
Data entry in progress.
46. SCARTAZZINI/VANDELLI (1929)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
47. CARLO GRABHER (1934)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
48. ERNESTO TRUCCHI (1936)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
49. DINO PROVENZAL (1938)  
Text machine-readable and being edited.
50. LUIGI PIETROBONO (1946)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
- \*51. ATTILIO MOMIGLIANO (1946)  
Text edited and in final form.
- \*52. MANFREDI PORENA (1946)  
Text edited and in final form.
- \*53. NATALINO SAPEGNO (1955)  
Text edited and in final form.

54. DANIELE MATTALIA (1960)  
Data entry in progress.
55. SIRO A. CHIMENZ (1962)  
Text machine-readable, not yet pre-edited.
56. GIOVANNI FALLANI (1965)  
Text machine-readable, pre-edited, soon to be edited.
- \*57. GIORGIO PADOAN (1967) (*Inferno* 1-8)  
Text edited and in final form.
- \*58. GIUSEPPE GIACALONE (1968)  
Text edited and in final form (*Inf. & Purg.*; *Par.* in 1989).
- \*59. BOSCO/REGGIO (1979)  
Text edited and in final form.
60. PASQUINI/QUAGLIO (1982)  
Data entry in progress.

Summary of Progress to Date (1984-88)

Commentaries fully edited:	19
being edited:	9
ready to be edited:	7
entered, awaiting pre-edit:	14
being entered:	8
ready to be entered:	2
being prepared for entry:	1

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# **Il *Giardeno*, poema di imitazione dantesca del '400: edizioni promesse e citazioni reticenti in un secolo di bibliografia**

Nicola De Blasi

È possibile che su un autore, per quanto di levatura non eccelsa, si susseguano durante un intero secolo titoli bibliografici ben poco informativi, se non completamente ripetitivi? Si direbbe di sì a giudicare dalle vicende toccate all'opera di Marino Jonata, poeta meridionale del Quattrocento, il cui caso può diventare forse esemplare per la conoscenza di una certa storia minore delle discipline filologiche, tanto da indurre a pensare che alla fortuna di Dante nel secolo XV corrisponda inesorabilmente la sfortuna bibliografica toccata nel corso del Novecento al suo tardo imitatore Marino Jonata.

1. Già nel 1851 il visconte Colomb de Batines, con un articolo sulla *Etruria*,<sup>1</sup> annoverava tra le imitazioni dantesche del Quattrocento il *Giardeno* dello Jonata, stampato a Napoli nel 1490, e già registrato dai bibliografi, ma, precisava il De Batines, "pare che niuno di essi l'abbia, mai, veduto" (Imbriani 5). A questa segnalazione seguirono ulteriori informazioni e una prima parziale edizione, destinata a non restare l'unico tentativo di pubblicazione del *Giardeno*, mentre con una nota apparsa sul *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, nel 1884, veniva data notizia della scoperta di un manoscritto del poema (Nazionale di Napoli XIII C 13), ritrovato da Pasquale Papa,<sup>2</sup> che era stato allievo di Vittorio Imbriani.

Questo annuncio suscitò una vivace reazione proprio da parte dell'Imbriani, pronto a ironizzare sul senso di una scoperta, a suo dire, insignificante o addirittura ridicola:

Può, mai, parlarsi, di scoperta d'un manoscritto, catalogato, in una biblioteca pubblica, sotto la stessa rubrica: ANGIONESE, sotto cui, è catalogata l'opera stampata? Scoperta? Sia pure! Però, in un senso relativo e subiettivo. Scoperta, solo, per riguardo, alla persona, che, prima, ne ignorava

l'esistenza. Ma i compilatori ed i compulsatori precedenti, tutti, del catalogo, d'esso manoscritto conoscevano l'esistenza.<sup>3</sup> (Imbriani 11)

Con il suo intervento infervorato, Imbriani sosteneva le ragioni di un giovane studioso, Francesco Ettari, che aveva diligentemente accolto il suo consiglio di dedicare la propria tesi di laurea al *Giardeno* di Jonata, a partire della lettura dell'incunabolo (Imbriani 8-10),<sup>4</sup> e, in seguito, del manoscritto.

La tesi di laurea che coronò lo studio di Ettari apparve direttamente a stampa nel 1885:<sup>5</sup> comprendeva una premessa su fonti e bibliografia, biografia dell'autore (tratta per lo più dalle note marginali del manoscritto), osservazioni sul poema (compresi alcuni ingenui confronti qualitativi con la *Commedia*!) e, merito più importante, la trascrizione, peraltro non priva di pecche, dei primi sette canti dell'opera, che nelle sue tre parti ne conta in tutto ben cento-sei. L'Ettari prometteva la pubblicazione completa del poema: ne fu invece distolto o dalla concorrente identica iniziativa ventilata da Pasquale Papa<sup>6</sup> o dalla dura recensione al suo lavoro.<sup>7</sup>

Il primo saggio di edizione (o, se si preferisce, di trascrizione) non è stato mai superato in seguito, né dall'Ettari stesso, né da altri: Pasquale Papa, infatti, si limitò a dare alle stampe un opuscolo, *Per fnirla*,<sup>8</sup> in cui riprendeva anche la polemica sul *Giardeno* in un contesto dai toni fortemente anti-imbrianeschi. Delle due annunciate edizioni, quindi, evento non rarissimo nella storia degli studi filologici, non se ne ebbe nessuna. O, almeno, non se ne ebbe nessuna completa, mentre furono pubblicate altre due edizioni parziali. La prima ad opera di Carlo Del Balzo, che incluse nella sua opera antologica sulla poesia di imitazione dantesca l'intero canto XI del *Giardeno*.<sup>9</sup> La seconda fu invece procurata da Benedetto Croce<sup>10</sup> con la pubblicazione di un brano del poema (di 45 versi) in lode della città dell'Aquila presente solo nel manoscritto (ff. 86-87) ed espunto dalla stampa del 1490.

Nel breve arco del biennio 1884-85 furono perciò prodotti gli scritti più significativi sul *Giardeno*. In seguito, se si escludono gli interventi di Del Balzo e di Croce, non appare più nulla di nuovo, a dispetto, ed è qui il dato da sottolineare, di un rincorrersi di contributi diversi.

2. Singolare è senza dubbio la sorte del lavoro editoriale di Ettari che, dimenticato o quasi in Italia, riapparve imprevedibilmente in

una nuova veste linguistica, come risorto dall'oblio e come nuova pubblicazione, nella rivista americana *Romanic Review*, a quasi quarant'anni dalla prima apparizione napoletana e dalla recensione sul *Giornale Storico*. La redazione in lingua inglese è, rispetto a quella originale, un po' alleggerita nella parte introduttiva, e lievemente migliorate sembrano le cure dedicate alla trascrizione dei primi sette canti che restano i soli editi.

Potrebbe dirsi tardiva la decisione di ripubblicare, per quanto in altra lingua e in sede decisamente di maggior prestigio, un lavoro giovanile, ma forse l'Ettari, che tra l'altro non menziona la sua precedente pubblicazione, riteneva ormai sopite e dimenticate le polemiche che avevano accompagnato la sua tesi di laurea e constatava a giusta ragione che nessuna delle edizioni promesse era giunta a buon fine. Il numero della rivista americana con lo studio sul *Giardeno* fu segnalato, secondo la prassi consueta, dal *Giornale Storico*, ma nessun collegamento fu stabilito tra l'articolo americano dell'Ettari e la recensione di tanti anni prima al suo opuscolo napoletano.<sup>11</sup>

Già di per sé insolita fino a questo punto, la storia editoriale del *Giardeno* e della tesi di Ettari assume toni quasi inquietanti o addirittura perturbanti quando, dopo un altro intervallo di tempo di circa quarant'anni, nel 1966, l'estratto di *Romanic Review* è edito in un volume a sé che, uscito verosimilmente postumo, si configura come terza puntata di una storia editoriale distribuitasi lungo un ottantennio, passata attraverso le prime due fasi del 1885 e del 1924 (questa è la data del *Copyright*, detenuto dalla *Columbia University Press* di New York, dichiarata nel *reprint*) e caratterizzata, nonostante le due traduzioni e ristampe americane, da poca fortuna, almeno in termini di citazioni bibliografiche, come si può dedurre dagli accenni che altri hanno riservato al poema di Jonata.

3. Quasi mai al lavoro di Ettari è riconosciuto il riguardo che gli si dovrebbe, se non altro in termini di completa e corretta citazione, tanto che dai rimandi fatti da altri non è per niente chiaro che lo studioso napoletano abbia prodotto un'edizione parziale del testo, la più ampia mai pubblicata.

Non rende completa giustizia ad Ettari neanche Vittorio Rossi (ed è quanto dire!) che, mentre segnala con la consueta precisione, nel suo *Quattrocento*, il nesso tra la pubblicazione del 1885 e quella del 1923, offre solo un rinvio incompleto all'articolo americano:

F. Ettari, *El Giardeno di M. Jonata Agnonese poema del sec. XV*, in *Giorn. napol. di filosofia e lettere*, 9, 1885, p. 772 sgg., e di nuovo, *a b b r e v i a t o*, in *Romanic Review*, 14, 1923, pp. 131-167 . . . (spaziatura aggiunta). (Rossi 278)

Il testo dei primi libri del *Giardeno* si trova stampato infatti alle pp. 131-167 del secondo fascicolo del 1923 della rivista, ma alle pp. 1-46 del primo fascicolo dello stesso anno si incontra la parte introduttiva del lavoro, che sfugge alla citazione del Rossi: la redazione americana risulta pertanto "abbreviata" rispetto alla napoletana. Del tutto irrilevante, come si può immaginare, tale svista del Rossi, mentre è invece notevole che dalla nota non risulti il tipo di contributo (edizione parziale o altro) offerto dall'Ettari.

La breve rassegna bibliografica dell'autore del volume di storia letteraria dedicato a tutto il *Quattrocento* italiano sarà stata presente all'Altamura che nel 1941 pubblicò un lavoro incentrato esclusivamente sul solo Umanesimo meridionale, dedicando perfino a Jonata un paragrafo corredato dai seguenti rinvii:

Cfr., precedentemente all'art. dell'Imbriani, la nota pubblicata dal Colomb De Batines nell'*Etruria* di Firenze (I, 1851, p. 391), che studiò il *Giardeno* nei tre esemplari della Palatina di Firenze, della Corsiniana e della Nazionale di Napoli. Per altre notizie v. F. Ettari, "*El Giardeno*" di M. Jonata Agnonese, (in *Giorn. napol. di filos. e lett.*, IX, 1885, pp. 772 sgg., e di nuovo *a b b r e v i a t o*, in *Romanic Review*, XIV, 1923, pp. 131-67) . . ." (spaziatura aggiunta). (Altamura, *L'Umanesimo* 74)<sup>12</sup>

Lo studio monografico (che avrà senz'altro avuto i suoi difetti) sembra quindi, secondo questo rinvio, contenere null'altro che notizie varie, e non una parte del testo del *Giardeno* (addirittura più particolareggiato, non si sa poi perché, è il rinvio al contributo del Colomb de Batines); e risalta ancor di più in questo caso anche l'assenza di ogni riferimento al *Quattrocento* di Rossi, che sin dalla prima edizione conteneva un accenno a Jonata (compreso quell'*abbreviato* che, inserito nella terza edizione, diventa quasi un errore-guida in questa piccola ricostruzione bibliografica), laddove nel corso del nostro secolo la tendenza è stata quella di far passare l'Agnonese per un personaggio del tutto ignoto agli italianisti.

Da una rassegna bibliografica concepita come quella appena letta fino alla scomparsa completa del nome di Ettari il passo è breve, e si realizza in pieno finanche in studi di altissimo livello sul Quattro-



cento napoletano che però sfiorano appena il *Giardino*. Ciò accade nella fondamentale edizione delle *Rime* di De Jennaro procurata da M. Corti, che nel citare Jonata (il cui poema può essere in verità a stento accostato alle *Sei etate* di De Jennaro) dà le seguenti notizie sui titoli precedenti:

Cfr. il *Giardino* di M. Jonata da Agnone (Imbriani, *Notizie di M. Jonata Agnonese*, in *Rend. R. Acc. di sc. mor. e pol. di Napoli*, XXIV (1885), pp. 44-77; Altamura, *Uman.*, pp. 73-74 con bibliog.) in tre cantiche, terminato nel 1465, (Croce, *Ricerche di antica letteratura meridionale*, Arch. stor. nap. LVI (1931), pp. 5-86, a p. 44). (De Jennaro xv)

Solo per completare le informazioni di cornice intorno all'opera di De Jennaro la Corti inserisce un riferimento, necessariamente fugace, al *Giardino* di Jonata e si limita ad un veloce rinvio ad una bibliografia che solo ad un primo sguardo, come si è visto, può apparire completa. Non rimangono tracce del nome di Francesco Ettari, né del suo lavoro, neanche nel capitolo sulla letteratura volgare in età aragonese della collettiva *Storia di Napoli*; in questa occasione, infatti, A. Altamura, autore del contributo, nel citare alcuni brani del poema di Jonata, prescinde da ogni completo riferimento bibliografico e rinvia soltanto a sé stesso.<sup>13</sup>

Neanche nell'opera che costituisce in genere la prima e più immediata fonte di informazione, se non il punto di partenza, per chi si occupi di storia culturale napoletana e di antichi testi del Regno di Napoli, vi è quindi notizia di una parziale edizione del *Giardino*, né può sorgere alcun sospetto in merito poiché il testo è presentato come "un altro poemetto pressoché sconosciuto" (Altamura, "Napoli aragonese" 503) di modo che dell'esistenza del lavoro di Ettari si può venire al corrente solo per via di indiscrezioni o grazie al rinvenimento casuale di articoli ottocenteschi o di estratti recenti sempre meno citati.

Pressoché "sconosciuto" il poema è ancora nel 1976, stando alle informazioni che l'Altamura raccoglie sugli imitatori meridionali di Dante, da tempo in verità non più ignoti per merito di lavori dello stesso o di altri studiosi.<sup>14</sup> Dieci anni dopo l'edizione americana in estratto del saggio di Ettari, non ve ne è notizia nella nota iniziale del volume sugli imitatori danteschi, che cita solo il primo lavoro di Ettari e si limita a ricordare gli scritti di Albino, Imbriani, Ciampa (un magistrato di Agnone, già contraddetto cinquantacinque anni prima

da Croce), Del Balzo, Casa, Croce, nonché dello stesso Altamura. Il nome di Ettari in verità ricorre per primo ma, anche qui, in un contesto piuttosto sibillino:

Per notizie sul Gionata cfr. F. Ettari nel "Giornale napoletano di filosofia e lettere," IX (1885), fascicoli 32-33. (Altamura-Basile 57)

Manca in tal modo la possibilità di sapere quale differenza possa sussistere tra il lavoro di Ettari e gli altri citati. Ne consegue, pertanto, che qualsiasi lettore, in assenza di informazioni precise, è indotto a credere che brani del *Giardeno* siano pubblicati per la prima volta proprio dall'Altamura, che nel corso del capitolo dedicato al poema (cui, in verità, mal si addice, date le dimensioni, il ricorrente appellativo di poemetto), ne trascrive a più riprese dei passi, per un totale di centosettantotto versi, tutti dai primi sette libri del *Giardeno*, gli stessi pubblicati da Ettari. Occorre tuttavia segnalare la maggior perizia di Altamura nella trascrizione che presenta separazione di parole e punteggiatura, mentre Ettari aveva trascritto pressoché diplomaticamente.<sup>15</sup>

Ancora nel 1978 altri passi del *Giardeno* (sempre dai primi sette libri) sono antologizzati da Altamura (*La lirica* 53-58), ma la situazione non cambia rispetto alle informazioni bibliografiche date in precedenza, che qui ritornano anzi in una nota redatta negli stessi precisi termini di quella del volume sulle *Imitazioni*.

4. Dalle tre cadenzate edizioni parziali dell'Ettari, dalle segnalazioni successive dell'Altamura, dalle promesse edizioni di Papa e Albino, dalle notizie di volta in volta apparse sul *Giornale storico*, si direbbe, in conclusione, che il *Giardeno* di Marino Jonata abbia finora conosciuto solo studiosi disposti a dedicargli le attenzioni sufficienti per un primo esame, una prima valutazione o, nella migliore delle ipotesi, un iniziale saggio di edizione con promessa di integrazione successiva.

Novità assoluta ormai il *Giardeno* non è più da tempo e non può essere più (si spera) segnalato come tale, mentre resta ancora in attesa di uno studio complessivo che ne valuti anche le interessanti caratteristiche linguistiche. Questa breve nota ha inteso soltanto proporre lo strano caso di un testo fin troppo segnalato, più volte parzialmente edito, ma in sostanza ancora da studiare, nonostante una bibliografia non poverissima, e si è limitata a prospettare la necessità, per chi voglia studiare il *Giardeno*, di risalire agli scritti di Ettari e di Im-

briani (o, meglio ancora, a Jonata direttamente), prescindendo (con l'eccezione delle pagine di Croce) dalla pur vasta serie di apparenti contributi novecenteschi sull'argomento.

### Università della Basilicata

### NOTE

- 1 L'articolo, "Domenico de Napoli e Marino Yonata Angionese poco conosciuti del secolo xv," è riportato interamente da Vittorio Imbriani, che scrive così: "Ecco lo articoletto del bibliofilo e dantofilo oltramontano, che si mostrava più zelante ed operoso de' letterati Italiani"(4). *Angionese* è da intendere come *agnonese*, cioè originario di Agnone, oggi nel Molise. Il poema è tra le primissime attestazioni letterarie del volgare di età aragonese a Napoli (precede di qualche anno la produzione dei lirici di corte): la lingua è meridionale, con tratti caratteristici di area abruzzese.
- 2 "Il signor Pasquale Papa ha rinvenuto nella Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli un ms. del *Giardino* poema in terza rima del quattrocentista Marino Jonata di Agerone (*sic*), condotto ad imitazione della Divina Commedia. È il primo ms. che di questo poema giunge a notizia degli studiosi, e la sua importanza è accresciuta dall'esservi il poema corredato di un commento dovuto allo stesso autore, che offre qualche lume di storiche notizie intorno alla sua vita, di cui fin qui non si sapeva che pochissimo. Il poema sarà pubblicato a cura del sig. Papa e del sig. Francesco Ettari che già attende a trascriverlo" (*Giornale storico della Letteratura Italiana* 3 [1884]: 476). Il commento marginale che correda il testo del ms. è in latino. Un annuncio uscì anche sul *Pungolo* e sul *Fanfulla della Domenica* (P. Papa, *Per finirlo* 4).
- 3 Ben più espressiva la chiusa dell'ironico capoverso sulla scoperta del Papa: "Così, chi vedesse scollacciata, per la prima volta, una bella donna, potrebbbero (*sic*) scoprirle un neo, sull'omero, già, similmente, scoperto, da quanti l'han visto, prima. E chiunque capita, a Napoli, può scoprire Fontana Medina e la Riviera di Chiaja!" (Imbriani 11).
- 4 F. Ettari è lodato per aver presentato già stampata la sua tesi di laurea alla Facoltà, per aver accettato il consiglio di Imbriani: "A più d'uno, suggerii di scèrre il *Giardino*, per tema d'una monografia o della tesi di laurea. Parecchi s'accenser di zelo . . . o fecer le viste; e, poi, indietreggiarono. Non così il professor Francesco Ettari. . . , " (Imbriani 8), e per aver lavorato durante un intero anno ("l'anno scorso," quindi nel 1884) mentre imperversava in Napoli un'epidemia di colera che provocò la morte di un fratello dello stesso Ettari: "che, ingenuamente caritatevole, accudiva i colerosi, ascrittosi, ad una delle brigate, che gente furba organizzò . . . perché? . . . Vattelappesca!" (Imbriani 8).

- 5 *El Giardeno di Marino Jonata Agnonese poema del secolo XV*, tesi di laurea di Ettari Francesco, Estratto dal *Giornale Napoletano di filosofia e Lettere* 9:32-33 (1885):1-72. La copia di questa pubblicazione conservata alla Nazionale di Napoli porta la firma di *Ettari Francesco* e la data, 7 Gennaio 1885.
- 6 "L'Ettari promette di continuare le sue indagini, intorno a Marino Jonata; (. . .) Ov'egli si disanimasse o indugiasse, troppo, possiamo, credo, fare assegnamento, sul Papa, giovane serio e solerte e sollecito, che (obbligato, dalla sua parola!) farà, di tutto, per ripubblicare il *Giardeno*: od accordandosi o gareggiando, con l'Ettari. Sarebbe, davvero, peccato, che il materiale, ch'esso Papa deve avere, in pronto, e gli studi, ch'e' deve aver fatti (secondo l'annuncio, che, come ho detto, fece inserire, ne' giornali!) andassero perduti. E (chi sa? chi sa?) dopo tanto oblio, forse, a breve intervallo, ci avremo due ristampe e due illustratori del poema dello Angionese. *Ex privatis odiis respublica crescit.*" (Imbriani 27). La scoperta del Papa, come si è già segnalato, fu annunciata anche dal *Fanfulla della Domenica* e dal *Pungolo* (Papa, *Per finirla* 4).
- 7 Piuttosto severo il giudizio sulle capacità filologiche dell'Ettari, che avrebbe trascritto il testo "senza correggere gli errori manifesti, senza cercare di far tornare i versi (. . .) senza aggiungere di suo neppure la indispensabile punteggiatura. Una buona metà di questo opuscolo è opera d'amanuense" ("Recensione" 456); ancor più netto il parere del recensore a proposito di una completa pubblicazione del poema: "Quanto sia opportuna tale pubblicazione non sappiamo dire: quel che ci sembra certo è che il sig. Ettari non è in alcun modo preparato ad un lavoro simile. Una pura ristampa del poema, nel modo come furono dati i sette canti di saggio, sarebbe una sconcezza" ("Recensione" 457). La recensione, non firmata, può forse attribuirsi a Rodolfo Renier, se può valere come indizio il fatto che egli in seguito si sarebbe in due occasioni interessato alle opere del De Jennaro, poeta della corte aragonese, contemporaneo, o quasi, di Jonata. (Renier, "Notizia" 248 [si tratta delle *Sei etate* di De Jennaro] e "Opere inesplorate"). In questa recensione sembra di poter intravedere non tanto un diretto attacco al giovane Ettari, quanto un conflitto tra due diversi modi di concepire il contatto con gli antichi testi. Un giudizio limitativo è infatti espresso anche sulla relazione dell'Imbriani, che, a dire dell'estensore della nota di segnalazione, "tratta del *Giardeno*, con maggior copia d'erudizione e con maggior oculatezza (se non con metodo molto migliore) di quello che abbia fatto il sig. F. Ettari." ("Notizia redazionale," *Giornale storico della Letteratura Italiana* 6:309).
- 8 La storia del ritrovamento del ms. ("cercatolo a bella posta"), dell'incontro tra Papa ed Ettari in Biblioteca, della generosità del Papa stesso ("si fissò di fare assieme il lavoro") è narrata alle pp. 3-7, inserita all'interno di una tirata polemica contro Gaetano Amalfi, che aveva accusato A. Bartoli di aver plagiato Imbriani. L'episodio del *Giardeno* è narrato a dimostrazione della "buona fede della ditta" Amalfi-Imbriani, ovvero del "suggeritore" e del "procuratore" dell'Ettari (4). Altri interventi nella polemica sul presunto plagio di Bartoli:

- P. Papa, "Ed ora il signor Gaetano Amalfi con un libello meditato un annetto viene a dirci che il volume della Storia della Letteratura Italiana del Bartoli è un plagio da cima a fondo" (*Sul quinto volume*) e G. Amalfi: "Il Bartoli segue, passo passo, l'Imbriani . . ." (*Adolfica*). "Imbriante" è considerata da Papa la tendenza di Amalfi a vedere Imbriani dappertutto.
- 9 C. Del Balzo, *Poesie* 73-83. Del Balzo riproduce il testo dall'incunabolo e nel rammentare la bibliografia precedente segnala che Imbriani è intervenuto "aggiungendo poche cose alle già dette dall'Ettari, rinverdendo polemiche e pettegolezzi tra il Papa e l'Ettari." Inoltre informa che l'avv. Pasquale Albino di Campobasso, direttore della Biblioteca Molisana, collezione editoriale delle opere scritte da autori molisani, aveva iniziato la riproduzione dell'incunabolo presso la tipografia di E. Perino editore di Roma. L'Albino, autore di un articolo apparso su "La Nuova Provincia del Molise" nel 1885, verosimilmente non ha portato a termine il suo progetto, che annunciò forse solo al fine di entrare in lizza nella polemica tra Papa ed Ettari, cercando di superare entrambi nella gara degli annunci.
- 10 B. Croce, "Poesia volgare" ora in *Aneddoti* 53-55.
- 11 A proposito del primo fascicolo della rivista, della prima metà del lavoro di Ettari, si legge: "L'A. dà notizia del ms. di questo poemetto del XV sec., dell'incunabolo, tratta la biografia dell'autore e mette in risalto le caratteristiche del componimento" (Segnalazione di Ettari, *Giornale Storico*, 412). La continuazione del contributo sul fascicolo 2-3 è così commentata: "L'A. pubblica il testo di questo poemetto." In questa nota informativa sul sommario di *Romanic Review* il *Giardino* è per la prima volta definito "poemetto" forse perché lo si ritiene pubblicato per intero nelle circa trenta pagine della seconda parte dell'articolo di Ettari.
- 12 Altri contributi citati sono quelli di F. Casa e V. Zabughin (pp. 124-28 e 168-69) e gli scritti di N. Ciampa citati da Croce. In un lavoro di "bibliografie e testi inediti" è proprio la bibliografia a mostrare dei lati deboli.
- 13 A. Altamura, "Napoli aragonese. La letteratura" 565, nota 5, che si riferisce al *Rosarium de spinis* di fra' Domenico Mercari dell'ordine dei Predicatori, detto Domenico da Napoli: "Ne diedi notizia per primo nel 'Giornale Dantesco,' XLII (1941) pp. 93 sgg.—Nel medesimo scritto si trovano notizie anche sui consimili poemetti del Gionata e del De Iennaro." Il fra' Domenico Mercari è lo stesso la cui opera (stampata nel 1475) è segnalata da Colomb de Batines, "Domenico de Napoli" 5 dell'*art. cit.* di V. Imbriani, contributi che altrove risultano entrambi noti all'Altamura (cfr. *L'Umanesimo*).
- 14 A. Altamura—P. Basile: il capitolo su Jonata (che anche qui diventa Gionata) è a pp. 57-68, ma non è chiaro cosa di questo capitolo sia dovuto ad A. Altamura e cosa a Pina Basile, poiché non esiste nessun indizio, né alcuna nota dichiarativa, in tal senso. Il *Giardino*, ad ogni buon conto, è ancora presentato come "pressoché sconosciuto" (p. 57).
- 15 Non sono invece illuminanti le notizie biografiche riportate nel volume: a p. 58 si dice che Jonata sarebbe morto "dopo il '75, ma non prima del '90

(allorché il figlio pubblicò, postumo, il poemetto paterno),” dove l’unico dato certo il *terminus ad quem* del 1490 diventa, forse anche per un perfido errore di stampa, un secondo *terminus a quo*, per cui viene involontariamente affermato che la data di morte di Jonata è sì dopo il 1475, ma è dopo (“non prima del”) il 1490.

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# Dante and Peraldus: The *aqua falsa* of Maestro Adamo (A Note on *Inferno* 30. 64–69)

R. A. Shoaf

*In Memoriam* Judson Boyce Allen (1932–1985)

When Dante and Virgil first encounter Maestro Adamo, in canto 30 of the *Inferno*, he laments his torments to them and, at one point, he complains:

Li ruscelletti che d'i verdi colli  
del Casentin discendon giuso in Arno,  
faccendo i lor canali freddi e molli,  
sempre mi stanno innanzi, e non indarno,  
che l'*imagine* lor vie più m'*asciuga*  
che 'l male ond'io nel volto mi discarno.

(*Inf.* 30.64–69; emphasis added)

Images of water that dry or parch are such a surprising and arresting figure in this passage just because water and its image are so naturally and, we would perhaps say, immediately perceived *to do the opposite*. Under normal conditions in this world, water and its image cool and refresh an observer. So much is this the case that it seems unnatural or perverse for water or its image to do the opposite. In such an event, normal conditions obviously do not obtain, and such conditions as do obtain are precisely hellish. And such unnaturalness and hellishness are exactly what Dante relies on to articulate and emphasize the kind and the degree of Adamo's punishment.

For Adamo, as we know, is a counterfeiter or falsifier (*Inf.* 30.115); and as his *contrapasso*, the counterfeiter suffers from counterfeit or *falsified* images of water. The images are real, very real for Adamo, but they are not *true*, even as counterfeit coins are real but not true. The images, in short, *look like* water, but they are not true to the nature of water—they falsify it. In a book which I published some years ago, I studied this *contrapasso* and its implications at some

length (Shoaf 39–48). At the time I wrote this book, however, I was unaware of a piece of evidence which goes far toward confirming the interpretation of the *contrapasso* which I offer there and here. The purpose of the present note is to document this new evidence and demonstrate its relevance to the episode in *Inferno*.

As part of a long-term study of the figuration of *avaritia* in medieval literature generally, and in Dante in particular, I have been examining the lengthy chapter on this vice in the *Summa Virtutum ac Vitiurum* of Guillaume Peraldus.<sup>1</sup> Peraldus in this chapter repeats and continues the ancient tradition of the avaricious man as suffering from or at least resembling one who suffers from hydropsy (Peraldus 2: 57–58).<sup>2</sup> This, we know, is the disease from which Maestro Adamo suffers (*Inf.* 30.52–57); and it is, of course, consonant with his sin that he should suffer the disease traditionally associated with the avaricious: after all, his prime motive for counterfeiting would have been avarice, which is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6.10).

After citing this tradition, Peraldus goes on to explain why the avaricious or hydroptic man can never be filled, never satisfied:

Qui vult sitim cupiditatis suae divitiis sedare, similis est illi, qui vult sitim corporalem extinguere *falsam aquam* bibendo. Aqua falsa ex eo quod aqua, nata est sitim extinguere, et *eo quod falsa nata est eam provocare*: Sic divitiae in quantum aliquem defectum supplent, sitim sedant, in quantum vero multos defectus, secum afferunt, sitim provocant (2: 59; emphasis added).

The relevance of this explanation to Dante's figure of the images of water that parch should be obvious. Those images are *aqua falsa*, counterfeit or *falsified* water, precisely because, like it, they are "born to provoke thirst," not to extinguish it—they look like water but they are not true to the nature of it.

Numerous other sources doubtless inform Dante's episode.<sup>3</sup> But it seems almost certain that one of his sources was Peraldus on the vice of avarice: Peraldus's image of "false water" corresponds tellingly to Dante's words "l'immagine lor vie . . . m'asciuga." Moreover, given the enormous popularity of the *Summa*, the relationship proposed here is certainly plausible. But what may be more important finally is the additional suggestion that Dante turned to Peraldus not just because he was popular but also because he, Dante, was interested in figuring lower hell as the space of avarice, as the place where

the *root* of all evil is exposed and punished. Although much more research will be needed to confirm the matter, I suspect and speculate that medieval treatises on avarice are going to tell us a very great deal about the structure and the imagery of the lower cantos of *Inferno*.<sup>4</sup>

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## NOTES

- 1 On the importance, popularity and great influence of this book, see Bloomfield 124–25 and Tuve 81 and 113n., 114n. and 134.
- 2 On this tradition see Bloomfield 80 and 362, n. 102. Also consult Durling 61–93, esp. 67–70. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the family and the estate of the late Judson Boyce Allen for granting me access to the Peraldus edition in his private collection of rare books and manuscripts.
- 3 See, in addition to the numerous sources discussed by Durling, my own account of Dante's use of Ovid's Narcissus narrative (*Metamorphoses* 3.339–510) in Shoaf 24–29.
- 4 I hope to report on this further research in a book now in progress, entitled *The Crisis of Convention in the Commedia*, a study of the 126 occurrences of the word *convenire* in the *Comedy*.

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# **“Domine, labia mea aperies”: Forese Donati and Ugolino**

Carolynn Lund Mead

In the *Purgatorio* Dante the pilgrim meets penitents such as Forese Donati who are experiencing the fact that, paradoxically, the natural appetites can only be satisfied spiritually. Because inhabitants of hell such as Ugolino lack this experience, Dante's purgatorial encounter with Donati acts as a gloss upon his former meeting with the count.<sup>1</sup> The subtext which, by means of allusions, joins together the antithetical experiences of Ugolino and of Forese is the Bible, read as a text in which the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old, in which Christ is the one who fulfills the election of Israel; in which God's redemptive line (as Cullmann designates it) proceeds from the physical realm to the spiritual: from the history of Israel through the history of the Church (the former as "preparation" for the Incarnation, the latter as "expansion," [105]), and culminates in the eschatological future.<sup>2</sup> While Forese Donati participates in this process of renewal, Ugolino becomes trapped in the present and the physical because he fails to recognize them as stages in an ongoing process.

On the sixth terrace of the purgation of gluttony, Dante meets penitents who, like Ugolino in the *Inferno*, are suffering from extreme hunger. Amidst singing and weeping Dante hears the words, "*Labia mea, Domine*," in a manner that gives birth both to joy and to grief ("per modo / tal, che diletto e doglia parturìe," 23.10–12). The complete phrase from which these words are taken in Psalm 51 (Lat. 50) reads (as is well known), "*Domine, labia mea aperies, / Et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam*" (v. 15; Lat. 17). This psalm is described, in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, as a "Prayer for healing and moral renewal (a lament)"; while it is "clear that the psalmist's problem is one of illness" (v. 8), the emphasis is upon restoration to moral, rather than physical, health (694). Although the penitents who repeat the words of this psalm are physically ema-

ciated by hunger, their prayer is that their lips may be opened, not that they may eat, but that they may praise God. The words of the psalm, in the King James Version, continue:<sup>3</sup>

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (16-17)

By using their mouths to repeat the verses of this Psalm, the starving penitents bring forth both the "diletto" of praise and the "doglia" of broken and contrite hearts, so that God, having accepted their offerings, will grant them spiritual renewal. In the *Inferno* Ugolino does not open his mouth either in praise of God or in contrition for his sins; he is silent, his heart turns to stone: "Io non piangëa, sí dentro impetraí" (33.49).

Because his heart solidifies instead of breaking up, Ugolino dooms himself to the banishment with which God punishes the obtuse Israelites in the wilderness, as recorded by the Psalmist and echoed by the Apostle Paul. Both writers warn their contemporaries: "Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness." To the generation who tried his patience for forty years, God swears in his wrath that they shall not enter his rest: "Si introibunt in requiem meam" (Ps. 95 [Lat. 94].8-11; Heb. 3.7-11).

Ugolino is not only denied God's rest, but also forced to live out one of the curses which Moses, on the threshold of the promised land, vows will befall the Israelites if they do not serve God "with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things":

Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee. . . . And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee. (Deut. 28.47-8, 53)

Ugolino's situation makes allusion to that which the Book of Lamentations describes as occurring during the siege of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.—"Parvuli petierunt panem, / Et non erat qui frangeret eis" (4.4):

Quando fui desto innanzi la dimane,

pianger senti' fra 'l sonno i miei figliuoli  
 ch'eran con meco, e dimandar del pane. (*Inf.* 33.37-39)

For Ugolino, as for the besieged remnant in Jerusalem, the breaking of bread in imprisonment becomes the act of cannibalism: "The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people" (*Lam.* 4.10).<sup>4</sup>

When Dante meets the penitents, they are so withered by hunger that Dante exclaims: "Ecco / la gente che perdé Ierusalemme, / quando Maria nel figlio diè di becco!" (*Purg.* 23.28-30). Maria, during the siege of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D., was driven by hunger to kill and eat her infant son.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Ugolino and Maria, the souls in purgatory do not submit to their physical cravings; they find spiritual solace in their suffering. Ugolino and Maria open their mouths to consume their offspring whose lives have been sacrificed, only to lose their own lives; the penitents beseech God to open their mouths so that they may bring forth ("parturie") offerings of praise and sacrifices of contrition, which will generate their spiritual rebirth.

Forese Donati, in explaining to Dante the significance of their penance, says:

E non pur una volta, questo spazzo  
 girando, si rinfresca nostra pena:  
 io dico pena, e dovria dir sollazzo,  
 ché quella voglia a li arbore ci mena  
 che menò Cristo lieto a dire "Eli,"  
 quando ne liberò con la sua vena. (*Purg.* 23.70-75)

The famished Forese, who finds "sollazzo" in being led to the inverted tree (the fruits of which he cannot eat), and the dying Christ upon the cross, "lieto a dire 'Eli,'" stand in opposition to Ugolino, who experiences unmitigated anguish when his son Gaddo dies saying, "Padre mio, ché non m'aiuti?" (*Inf.* 33.69). The words attributed to Christ and to Gaddo allude, of course, to Christ's cry upon the cross, as recorded in the gospels, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*Matt.* 27.46 [*Mark* 15.34]),<sup>6</sup> words from the opening cry of distress in Psalm 22 (*Lat.* 21).

The description of the experience of distress in the verses of the psalm which follow this introduction makes use of a metaphor that

is dramatized in Ugolino's dream:

Quoniam circumdederunt me canes multi;

. . .

Erue a framea, Deus, animam meam,

Et de manu canis uncam meam. (17, 21)

In Ugolino's dream, "cagne magre" pursue an exhausted father and his sons and tear their flanks with sharp teeth (*Inf.* 33.31–36). Unlike the Psalmist, Ugolino does not pray to God for deliverance, nor is he able to respond to his dream other than with despair. The Psalmist, on the other hand, ends with a cry of triumph, a declaration of faith: "The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever" (v. 26). Augustine, in his commentary on this psalm, says that these words are "spoken in the person of the Crucified" (144), who declares that those who will eat and be satisfied "shall eat, and imitate Me." They "will neither desire this world's abundance, nor fear its want"; their hearts will live forever because their food is "the food of the heart" (148). Unlike Foresi Donati, who like the Psalmist (and Christ) is able to turn despair into spiritual triumph, Ugolino becomes one of the devouring dogs that he, like the Psalmist, feared: Dante notices that Ugolino's teeth, as he gnaws Ruggieri's head, are strong like a dog's ("come d'un can, forti" [33.78]).

Foresi Donati's reference to Christ's cry upon the cross suggests not only that Ugolino could have turned his physical deprivation into spiritual abundance, but also that he could have interiorized and actualized Christ's other words on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23.34). Instead of ceaselessly gnawing on his enemy Ruggieri's head, "come 'l pan per fame si manduca" (*Inf.* 32.127), Ugolino could be looking forward with hope to joining the paradisaical eucharistic feast: the "sodalizio eletto a la gran cena / del benedetto Agnello, il qual vi ciba / sí, che la vostra voglia è sempre piena" (*Par.* 24.1–3).

Ugolino in hell is trapped forever in a repetitive re-enactment of a powerful biblical curse which is used to warn the Israelites at liminal periods in their history. It is the curse which Moses warns the Israelites (at the time of their transition to the promised land) will befall them in the future if they become obdurate; it is the curse which Jeremiah and Ezekiel ("the two prophets," as Rosenberg states,



"who most epitomized Israel's transition to exile" [184]) repeat to God's wayward people (Jer. 19.9; Ezek. 5.10); it is the curse which the inhabitants of Jerusalem experience, not only once but for a second time.<sup>7</sup> In the actualization of this curse, God's chosen people devour their own flesh in God's designated city. This short-circuiting of the birth-death cycle is the final outcome of the self-reflexivity of physical nature without spiritual recourse, of man without God, of a present without an eschatological future.

In response to this impasse, Christ is the one who, as the ultimate contraction of the remnant of Israel, the suffering servant of Second Isaiah, offers himself as sacrifice "for the sin of many" (Isa. 53.12). Christ, "lieto a dire 'Elí,' / quando ne liberò con la sua vena" (*Purg.* 23.74-75), functions (as Dante learns) both as the mid-point and as the goal of God's redemptive line of history. Not only is Christ the inspiration for Forese Donati's penitential abstinence in purgatory, but in the eschatological future he will be the "benedetto Agnello" of "la gran cena," which is (as Moore indicates [374]) "the marriage supper of the Lamb" referred to in Revelation 19.9. The bride at this marriage feast will be "the holy city, new Jerusalem" (Rev. 21.2). As God's redeemed church, Jerusalem will feed spiritually upon her redeemer, "sí, che la vostra voglia è sempre piena." Because the pilgrim Dante traces the steps of the redemptive line from hell to paradise, "prima che morte tempo li prescriba," he is able to "fore-taste" ("preliba") that which falls from the table of "la gran cena / del benedetto Agnello" (*Par.* 24.4-6).

Dante's encounter with Forese Donati glosses his meeting with Ugolino by means of two cross-references: cannibalism during the sieges of Jerusalem, and Christ's despairing cry upon the cross. Ugolino, like Maria before him, hardens his heart and attempts, with tragic results, to requite physical deprivation with physical sustenance; Christ, as the fulfillment of the Psalmist before him and as the model for Forese Donati after him, breaks down in despair and triumphs in assuaging physical extremity with spiritual reassurance. In so doing he opens up this opportunity for all men, not only in the present era of history but in the eternal future.

## NOTES

- 1 From Iannucci comes the the seminal insight of Dante as "il miglior commentatore di se stesso" (306): "La poesia della *Commedia* è poesia 'critica' in quanto si ripiega continuamente sul proprio significato" (312). Iannucci demonstrates how "Le parole di Oderisi . . . servono implicitamente a commentare e precisare il significato di *Inferno* XV" (109). It is precisely this "episodio parallelo" that destroys Brunetto's notion of immortality. In his initial article, Iannucci expresses the opinion that Dante's Ugolino episode stands without a parallel (327-28). This paper suggests that Forese Donati's relationship to Ugolino demonstrates that the episode of Ugolino, rather than being an exception to Dante's *autoesegesi*, participates in it.
- 2 Cullmann describes what he calls "the line of Christ" in redemptive history in the New Testament and other Primitive Christian writings (where it is everywhere presupposed though seldom presented systematically or in chronological sequence) as follows: "Christ the Mediator of the Creation—Christ, God's Suffering Servant as the One who fulfills the election of Israel—Christ the Lord, ruling in the present—Christ the returning Son of Man as the one who completes the entire process and is the Mediator of the new creation" (109).
- 3 All English renderings of the Bible in this paper are from the King James Version.
- 4 Although Contini, Shapiro, and Freccero support the view that Ugolino cannibalizes his sons, there are of course dissenting voices. Singleton, for example, considers it a "curious view . . . hardly worth a serious rebuttal" (see notes to *Inf.* 33.75). The wording of *Inf.* 33.75, which suggests the possibility of cannibalism, and the supporting biblical allusions, which imply such an interpretation, appropriately give shape to a deed which is *unspeakable* (*infandum!*).
- 5 For bibliographical references and Benvenuto's account (in Latin with an English translation) of the story of Mary, see Singleton's notes to *Purg.* 23.28-30.
- 6 John Freccero expresses the opinion that, "Although critics have not noticed it until recently, the Christological language that is used to describe the children seems the most salient feature of the story" (56-57; 156). The particular critics to whom Freccero refers are Contini and Shapiro.
- 7 Cook and Herzman quote Jer. 19.8-9 (and footnote Isa. 49.26, Ezk. 5.10, and Deut. 28.53) to indicate that, along with several classical sources, the Old Testament "is also a source for the image of cannibalism itself" (379). They demonstrate that "the number of different kinds of sources he is able to use in a complementary way" is one testimony to Dante's richness.

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## A proposito del *crese* di *Purgatorio* 32.32

Mirella Pasquarelli

Tra gli hapax di Dante, uno dei più interessanti, sul piano della morfologia storica in rapporto all'italiano antico, è indubbiamente quello che si incontra in rima in *Purgatorio* 32.32:

Si passeggiando l'alta selva vota  
colpa di quella che al serpente *crese*,  
temprava i passi un'angelica nota.

Nel chiarire, invero brevemente, questo perfetto forte di *credere*, sia il Parodi (*Lingua* 259) che Brambilla Ageno (*Enciclopedia dantesca*, *Appendice* 220) lo ascrivono senza esitazione al senese, mentre N. Zingarelli, in un suo vecchio articolo, lo aveva supposto—senza specificare su che base—un “arcaismo fiorentino” (162). Della possibile fiorentinità, sia pure arcaica, di *crese* non esiste neanche oggi—dopo la pubblicazione di molti testi che lo Zingarelli all'epoca non poteva conoscere<sup>1</sup>—prova alcuna, e la supposizione pare senz'altro da scartarsi.

La Ageno, scrivendo nell'ultimo volume dell'*Enciclopedia dantesca*, che è dedicato per intero alla lingua di Dante, giudica il *crese* come del tutto eccezionale ed isolato tra i vari perfetti forti che Dante impiega, i quali risultano essere tutti di tipo toscano occidentale.

Nulla, fuorché chiosarlo, dicono i commentatori antichi sul *crese*. Il Buti spiega *ch'al serpente crese* con “cioè credette” (2: 782). Benvenuto con un identico “idest, quae credidit diabolus” (4: 246), mentre l'Anonimo Fiorentino non sente nemmeno la necessità di un “cioè” per spiegare *crese*, ma nella chiosa usa naturalmente “credette” (2: 515). Dal che si può tranquillamente dedurre che la forma non doveva, all'epoca, parere in alcun modo strana.

Quanto ai commentatori moderni, tutti si sbarazzano del *crese* nolto sommariamente, ma qualcuno rinvia al noto articolo di E.G. Parodi su “La rima e i vocaboli in rima nella *Divina Commedia*” (132), come per esempio C. Steiner (che aggiunge “è forma ancora viva

nell'Umbria" [422]), mentre A. Momigliano spiega la terzina, ma del *crese* non fa parola (2: 511). Assai vago F. Torraca, che dichiara il *crese* con "credette, vive in alcuni dialetti" senza ulteriori rinvii o precisazioni (605). Poco più, e non molto chiaramente, dice il Vandelli, per il quale "La forma *crese* per 'credette' è dell'uso ant. toscano, e tuttora viva nell'Umbria e altrove" (586), e si limita a rinviare parenteticamente al succitato articolo del Parodi. Ma neanche il Parodi adduce citazioni da testi antichi, asserendo soltanto che la forma era dell'antico senese, menzionata come viva dal *Vocabolario*,<sup>2</sup> e aggiunge che "rimane tuttora nell'umbro," senza però documentarlo.

Di ben poco ausilio sono anche le grammatiche storiche italiane di cui si dispone: il Meyer-Luebke, che secondo quanto dichiara il titolo dovrebbe in particolare illustrare i dialetti toscani, ricorda il *crese* di Dante tra i perfetti sigmatici analogici, ma nulla dice della sua vitalità o area di diffusione in Toscana o fuori (200). Più utile, ma su questo punto vago e impreciso, il Rohlfs, che però lascia intuire che la diffusione del perfetto sigmatico di *credere* supera senz'altro i confini del Senese e dell'Umbria e indica che esso vive in taluni dialetti attuali (2: 325), mentre il Tekavčić—che del resto non è sempre molto attento alle forme antiche o non facenti parte della lingua letteraria odierna—non menziona neppure il *crese*.

Si tratta comunque di una forma che non è poi entrata nella lingua letteraria, come del resto *potti* di *potere*, che Dante (e Boccaccio, ma non Petrarca) più volte impiega,<sup>3</sup> anche nella *Divina Commedia* (però in un solo caso).<sup>4</sup>

Non si vuol mettere in discussione la senesità del perfetto sigmatico di *credere*, dovuto storicamente, d'altra parte, ad una limpida equazione analogica che approda in italiano letterario all'accettazione di non pochi perfetti sigmatici non etimologici. Del resto, non sono numerosissime le attestazioni di *crese* in testi senesi antichi, almeno in base alla documentazione fornita, con riferimenti specifici, da L. Hirsch (436).<sup>5</sup>

Lo Hirsch adduce un caso di 1<sup>a</sup> sing., *crese*; tre casi di 3<sup>a</sup> sing., *crese*; e un caso di 3<sup>a</sup> plur., *cresero*. A queste attestazioni, possiamo oggi aggiungere la seguente citazione dalla recente edizione del Saviozzo:



L'area di diffusione di *crese* negli antichi volgari italiani.

Dov'è la festa, dove, traditore,  
che far per me da' tuoi parenti *cresti*?

(Pasquini 20)

Il tipo è attestato anche, come forma dell'uso, dal settecentesco vocabolario senese del fondo biscioniano, pubblicato dal Castellani ("Il *Vocabolario*" 70),<sup>6</sup> e, sempre come forma vivente, ancor oggi nella zona dell'Amiata, a sud di Siena (Fatini 41). Purtroppo, sulla diffusione attuale del tipo non soccorrono i materiali dell'Atlante linguistico italo-svizzero (AIS), nel quale il perfetto di *credere*, certo casualmente, non è documentato.

Da notare che, anche in senese, il perfetto forte di *credere* era concorrenziato da forme deboli del tipo *credetti* (cfr. Pasquini 231, s.v. *credere*). Purtroppo non si dispone di indicazioni precise di frequenza del perfetto sigmatico rispetto ai concorrenti deboli in uso nell'antico senese.

Ma l'area di diffusione del perfetto sigmatico di *credere* era assai più vasta di quanto non induca a pensare una sua sbrigativa attribuzione al senese: tale forma interessava anzi, come vedremo, una gran parte dei volgari antichi italiani centromeridionali.

Ricordiamo, intanto, che *crese* ricorre anche nel *Novellino*:

Il marito, udita la subita risposta e sì bene ordenata, o il *crese* o de *creder* mostrava. (37)

Ed è noto come la lingua di Masuccio, malgrado lo sforzo cosciente di epurazione degli elementi di impronta regionale, annoveri molto sovente forme di tipo napoletano (Petrocchi, *Masuccio* cap. IV; Nigro xx-xxii, xxix-xxxi). Sulla presenza del perfetto sigmatico di *credere* in antico napoletano diremo tra breve.

Ma, più vicino alla Toscana, *crese* si ritrova nell'umbro antico, ed è forma normale in Jacopone, da cui citiamo gli esempi seguenti:<sup>7</sup>

Omo che te laminti,      breve mente responno;  
tollenno lo to abbergo,    *crisice* far soiorno; (54; vv. 66-7)

Stàvime a ppredecare,  
ch'e' no n'avissi pagura;  
male te *crisi* allora,  
quando fic'el peccato. (83; vv. 9-12)

Salenno su *crisi* pusare,  
l'amor me non lassò finire, (234; vv. 83-4)<sup>8</sup>



Oltre che umbro antico,<sup>9</sup> si può tranquillamente ritenere che il perfetto sigmatico di *credere* fosse anche dei volgari marchigiani antichi: le attestazioni coeve mancano, ma la forma è viva—o lo era fino a non molti anni or sono—in dialetti moderni della regione, in particolare a Fermo e a Macerata in concorrenza, però, con *credetti* (Neumann-Spallart 453).

Scendendo verso sud, troviamo il tipo *crese* ampiamente documentato in antico romanesco. Ci limitiamo a citare alcuni esempi, tratti da testi diversi, mentre per ulteriori riferimenti si rinvia alla nota monografia di G. Ernst. Nelle duecentesche *Storie* (Monaci) si legge:

. . . et Pirrus, odenno quelle cose, *crese* che lo facesse per auaritia. (133)

Dalla trecentesca *Cronica*<sup>10</sup> dell'Anonimo Romano traiamo:

Non me *cresti* venire a badaluccare (23.13)

Questa fortezza se *crese* recuperare donno Alfonso per assedio (11.589)

Negli *Aneddoti in dialetto romanesco del sec. XIV* (Vattasso) incontriamo:

Tu m'ài ben contristato;

Questo non *cresti* che volessi petire (66; vv. 305–6)

Allora *crese* in Cristo et in sancto Cristofano (86; v. 367)

Con umbro e romanesco concordava anche, per quanto concerne il perfetto di *credere*, l'antico abruzzese, del quale ci è pervenuto un discreto numero di testi. Nei duecenteschi *Proverbia*, editi dall'Ugolini, si legge:

A cquillu non attendere ke ll'u canioctu attese:

Lazao lo certu correre pro quello ke sse *crese*.

(75; vv. 135–136)

La trecentesca *Cronica aquilana rimata* di Buccio di Ranallo, un testo redatto in un volgare abruzzese settentrionale grosso modo contiguo all'umbro e di cui si possiede l'edizione del De Bartholomaeis, documenta le seguenti forme:

Io me *crisci* ponerili dello loro peccato,

Che mai se remmezzassero; ma siali perdonato!

(40; vv. 15–16)

Quello che Bonajonta *crese* fare  
I lloro contrario, a lloro venne bene

(133; vv. 21-22)

Et tale cose *crisero* ch'è brutto ad  
recontare. (143; v. 12)

Quanto al *crisci* di 1<sup>a</sup> pers. sing., la forma fonetica è ovviamente dovuta alla metaforesi e al normale passaggio di *s* dentale a *s* palatale davanti a *i*, fatto che è ancora tipico dei dialetti abruzzesi odierni. Pure metafonizzata è la 3<sup>a</sup> plur. *crisero*, che ricorre anche nella *Leggenda del transito della Madonna* (Pércopo 1-45), attribuibile agli inizi del sec. XIV, stesa in un volgare abruzzese:

Quilli, che lli *crisero*, tucti foro  
guaruti (37; v. 598)

Un altro esempio di 3<sup>a</sup> pers. sing. si incontra nella *Leggenda dello Beatissimo Egregio Missere lu Barone Santo Antonio*, edita dal Monaci:

Queste parole sì li dicea,  
Se *crese* ca gabare lu volea. (497; v. 13)

In antico napoletano, le attestazioni del perfetto sigmatico di *credere* risultano abbastanza numerose e si riscontrano in testi che vanno dal Quattrocento al primo Settecento, epoca dopo la quale tutti i perfetti forti tendono ad essere rapidamente sostituiti da forme deboli analogiche fino a raggiungere, già nell'Ottocento, l'assetto odierno che non conosce più che perfetti deboli.<sup>11</sup>

Il primo esempio di perfetto sigmatico di *credere* che ci sia stato possibile rinvenire in un testo di ambito napoletano (a parte quello già citato dal *Novellino*) si legge nelle *Rime e lettere* di Pietro Jacopo De Jennaro (1436-1508), di cui ha dato un'eccellente edizione Maria Corti. Si ha un unico esempio, di 1<sup>a</sup> sing.:

Io *credi* esser in mensa e non so' in terra (52.16)

che è tanto più significativo in quanto, come osserva la Corti, "il De J., che ha plasmato la sua morfologia sui modelli letterari toscani, lascia ben poche tracce degli usi locali nella coniugazione dei verbi, e, anche quelle, più di natura fonetica che morfologica" (CLVII). Parrebbe, dunque, di potersi ritenere giustificati nel pensare che il De Jennaro riguardasse il perfetto sigmatico di *credere* come forma, oltre

che napoletana, anche a tutti gli effetti propria della lingua letteraria, tanto più che egli la impiega nuovamente nel suo poema, colmo di reminiscenze ed echi danteschi, *Le sei etate della vita umana*, in cui si legge:

Cossì dicendo in me subito nacque  
tal sincopa mortal che a voce stese  
*crese* gridar, quando mia lenga tacque. (4.3.30)

Altri esempi consimili si hanno negli autori minori contenuti nello stesso codice su cui si è basata la Corti per la sua edizione. Va però rilevato che De Jennaro adopera, accanto a *crese*, anche un altro perfetto forte di *credere* di origine analogica, cioè *critti* (esemplato su *potti*), di tipo siciliano.<sup>12</sup> La diffusione del tipo sigmatico in ambito napoletano quattrocentesco viene comunque ancora confermata dalla sua presenza in un altro, ben più modesto, anonimo poemetto ispirato dalla conoscenza della *Divina Commedia*, in cui si ha due volte *crese* e due volte *cresero* di 3<sup>a</sup> plur (Altamura e Basile 15, 16, 20, 22).

Con il Seicento, diventano numerosi i testi scritti in dialetto napoletano schietto, e il perfetto sigmatico di *credere* si incontra nuovamente nelle opere poetiche di Giulio Cesare Cortese (1570?-1627?),<sup>13</sup> che lo impiega ripetutamente. In base ad un mio computo manuale, se ne hanno quattro occorrenze in tutto, rispetto a quattro del tipo in *-ette*. In 1<sup>a</sup> pers. sing., con metaforesi:

Io scura me lo *crise* e dintro traso  
E nce restaie co no parmo de naso. (137)

In 3<sup>a</sup> sing.:

Micco se *crese* dereto le spalle  
Avere na scoppettata co doie palle. (166)  
Grannizia, ch'è vaiassa de natura,  
Subeto se lo *crese* ch'era ammata (192)  
E corcatase stritto l'abbracciaie,  
Ca non se *crese* maie tale iornata. (245)

In 3<sup>a</sup> plur.:

... chille vozzacchiune babuasse  
*Cresero* cierto quarche trademiento (271)

Nel Basile, invece, di cui—in assenza di una concordanza o glossario esaustivo—si è spogliata manualmente l'edizione del Petrinì,<sup>14</sup>

il perfetto sigmatico di *credere* è assente, il che per altro sarà da ritenersi casuale, dato che di *credere* non ricorre alcun esempio di perfetto in tutte le opere.

Un ultimo esempio del perfetto sigmatico di *credere* si ha ancora in Nunziante Pagano (1683–1756?) (Porcelli 18: 114), ma sembra chiaro che tale forma—del resto come la maggior parte dei restanti perfetti forti—fosse divenuta molto rara dopo la prima metà del Seicento.

Ciò che qui importava, comunque, era il dimostrare quanto vasta fosse ai tempi di Dante—ed ancora molto dopo—l'area di diffusione del perfetto forte sigmatico di *credere*. La cartina allegata riassume graficamente le testimonianze apportate dai testi citati: le due isoglosse sono ovviamente da considerarsi tracciate in modo approssimativo, ma pare certo che quella che delimitava a nord l'area di diffusione del tipo *crese* dividesse grosso modo in due la Toscana, passando poco a nord di Siena, lasciandosi a sud tutta l'Umbria e buona parte delle Marche. Quanto all'isoglossa meridionale, essa correva certo a sud di Napoli, comprendendo forse tutta l'attuale Campania, parte almeno della Basilicata,<sup>15</sup> la Puglia vera e propria e, con ogni probabilità, anche buona parte del Salento,<sup>16</sup> dove ancor oggi vive in alcune località (per esempio a San Cesario di Lecce e a Gallipoli) il perfetto sigmatico di *credere* (Rohlf, *Voc. dial. sal.* 1: 170. s.v. *critere*), sia pure in promiscuità con il tipo *critti* e con la forma debole. Mancano attestazioni antiche per la Calabria, ma è probabile che essa concordasse con la Sicilia ed avesse il tipo *critti*.

In vista di quanto fin qui esposto, si impone una rivalutazione dell'uso dantesco di *crese*: è ovvio che non lo si può considerare un mero municipalismo di una singola città toscana ed è, a nostro modo di vedere, fuorviante etichettarlo come tale: si trattava invece di una forma di amplissima diffusione nei volgari antichi, fatto di cui sembra veramente assurdo supporre che Dante—primo, e certo non malaccorto, scrutatore dei dialetti d'Italia—non avesse contezza. Egli poteva, pertanto, a buon diritto, ritenersi più che giustificato nell'usare quella forma che suonava non solo in buona parte della Toscana e nell'Umbria, ma in quasi tutta l'Italia peninsulare.

## NOTE

- 1 Per esempio Schiaffini, *Testi*, e Castellani, *Nuovi testi*.
- 2 Non è ben chiaro a che cosa intenda riferirsi il Parodi quando parla di un *Vocabolario*, ma deve trattarsi del lavoro di Scipione Bargagli, che egli stesso cita in precedenza (103 n. 1) a proposito d'altro (del *Turamino* si veda l'edizione moderna a cura di L. Serianini).
- 3 Nella *Vita Nuova* si ha la 3ª plurale *pottero* (23.13), *potti* è anche nel *Fiore* (161.3 e 190.6), ma Dante adopera più spesso le forme deboli del tipo *poté*.
- 4 "Udir non *potti* quello che a lor porsi" (*Inf.* 8.112). Taluni manoscritti hanno *potei* ma l'alternanza, come osserva il Petrocchi, "è risolvibile a favore del perfetto forte sulla base delle testimonianze" (*La Commedia* 1: 466).
- 5 Su quest'articolo si veda la severa recensione di E.G. Parodi, "Dialecti toscani," che però su *crese* (611), non aggiunge nulla di nuovo, se non il fatto che a sua conoscenza era ancora dell'uso vivo senese.
- 6 Il perfetto sigmatico viene elencato, ben inteso, accanto alle forme deboli, ugualmente dell'uso.
- 7 Si cita per pagina e verso secondo l'edizione delle *Laude* curata da F. Mancini.
- 8 La *i* tonica di *crisi* è ovviamente dovuta a metaforesi. Purtroppo la 1ª pers. sing. è l'unica attestata in Jacopone.
- 9 Andrebbe però ulteriormente indagata l'effettiva diffusione del tipo sigmatico del perfetto di *credere* in umbro antico, giacché un nostro spoglio, non esaustivo, di testi editi a stampa non ce n'ha fornito alcun esempio.
- 10 L'opera è conosciuta anche come *Vita di Cola di Rienzo*.
- 11 Come è desumibile, oltre che dalla lettura dei testi, anche da Capozzoli, *Grammatica*.
- 12 Questo tipo non è altrimenti attestato in area napoletana, ma al De Jennaro sarà parso forma sufficientemente illustre e degna della lingua letteraria grazie ai poeti della Scuola Siciliana (se ne hanno due esempi, entrambi di 3ª pers., *critte*, nelle *Rime e lettere*).
- 13 Seguo l'ottima edizione critica delle *Opere poetiche* curata da E. Malato.
- 14 Neanche la nuova edizione de *Lo cunto de li cunti* a cura di M. Rak comprende un glossario di alcun tipo (ha però la traduzione italiana a fronte).
- 15 Pochissimi i testi lucani antichi. Non si hanno esempi del perfetto di *credere* nel quattrocentesco volgarizzamento del *Liber de ortu Beatae Mariae et infantia Salvatoris* edito da M. Braccini, e neanche nei testi recentemente editi da A. M. Perrone Capano Compagna, *Testi lucani del Quattro e Cinquecento*.
- 16 Sono molto scarse le attestazioni di antico volgare in area salentina. Comunque, il perfetto di *credere* non ricorre nel *Libro di Sydrac*, detto anche *Sydrac salentino*, di cui diede un'edizione parziale V. De Bartholomaeis.

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Mario Aversano. *Il velo di Venere. Allegoria e teologia dell'immaginario dantesco*. Napoli: Federico e Ardia, 1984. Pp. 204.

Aversano's hypothesis in the eight closely linked chapters which make up this volume is that in the *Commedia* symbolism, along with theology, contributes to the formation of certain images whose function it is to guide. This is particularly true of *Purgatory*, the *cantica* in which bewilderment is most prominent. By stressing Dante's theological engagement, Aversano reveals new meanings of both cultural and poetic value.

Chapter 1 is an analysis of the concluding tercet of *Purgatory's* prologue, in which Dante invokes the muse of epic and lyric poetry, Calliope. Chapter 2 dwells on the same tercet, more specifically on the expression "Disperar perdono." The volume takes its title from Chapter 3, which establishes an association between the apparition of the planet Venus and the dream of the unveiling of the Siren. Chapter 4 suggests that Virgil's *auctoritas* for Dante is as unquestionable as that of Holy Scripture and intimates epicurean influences on the Christian poet. Chapter 5 examines the tercet which presents Aurora while Chapter 6 analyzes the syntax of *Purgatorio* 1. Chapter 7 is a reading of *Paradiso* 11 which takes into account the pre-eminence of the doctrinal and theological dimension. In Chapter 8 we find observations on the term "mezzo," which, as Aversano notes, appears frequently in the passages recalling the Sirens.

Included in the volume are a note on the symbolic meaning of the reed in *Purgatory* based on its scriptural roots, a comment on the symbolic meaning of the colour green in *Purgatory* and an appendix on the "valletta amena" in *Purgatorio* 7.

AST

Giovanni Barblan, ed. *Dante e la Bibbia*. Biblioteca dell' "Archivum Romanicum" 210. Firenze: Olschki, 1988. Pp. 370.

This volume is a compilation of the material presented at the international convention, *Dante e la Bibbia*, held in Florence from Sept. 26-28, 1986. The items (25 in all, including brief "interventi") are organized chronologically, as presented. Many articles are concerned with the thematic, structural, or theological significances of intertextual relationships: of how and why Dante makes his biblical appropriations (often filtered through traditional exegesis). Lucia Battaglia Ricci, nevertheless, admonishes scholars to adopt a more comprehensive appreciation of Dante's complex mode of assimilation.

Peter Dronke and Peter Armour present two different approaches to the interpretation of apocalyptic images in Dante's earthly paradise. Joan Ferrante treats the "wresting" of Biblical allusions by medieval writers (including Dante) for their own purposes, while Guglielmo Gorni focuses on the serious association of parody and scripture in Dante's work. Anna Chiavacci Leonardi demonstrates the centrality of the Resurrection in the *Commedia*, Jeffrey T. Schnapp, of the Transfiguration. Francesco Mazzoni discloses, for the first time, Psalm 147.16-18, along with Augustine's commentary, as the key to the interpretation of *Purgatorio* 30.85-99; Peter S. Hawkins examines Virgil's scriptural quotation "benedetta colei" (*Inf.* 8.45) within its context in Luke 11; Rachel Jacoff associates correspondences between Jeremiah and *Par.* 27 with thematic and structural considerations permeating both texts; Cesare Vasoli delineates the specific role of scriptural references in the *Convivio* and *Monarchia*. Giorgio Petrocchi discusses the role of Saint Paul in the works of Dante; John Freccero, of Augustine's *Confessions*. Marguerite Mills Chiarenza focuses on the relationship of Dante's theocentric vision to his geocentric universe.

Other articles examine specific areas of interest. Menachem Emanuel Artom outlines the role of the "contrapasso" in Hebraic literature, while Marco Adinolfi delineates eighteen Dantean *personaggi neotestamentari*, and Domenico De Robertis demonstrates that "la Bibbia è uno dei termini fondamentali" of the "sguardo" which united Guido Calvalcanti and Dante. In the polemic between theologians and biblical exegetes, according to Giuseppe Mazzotta, Dante defined his position by making use of both to establish himself as "il poeta di 'et . . . et' e non di banali 'aut-aut.'"

Index of Biblical locations with appropriate Dantean references.

CLM

Teodolinda Barolini. *Dante's Poets. Textuality and Truth in the Comedy*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984. Pp. xiv + 312.

Barolini's book attempts to outline what she calls a "self-reading" of Dante in the *Commedia* through an investigation of his reading of other poets, both epic (historical) and lyric (contemporary), and of his own early works. Her goal is to determine Dante's perception of textuality through an intertextual approach. Beginning with an analysis of his self-treatment as a poet, she focuses in Chapter 1 on the *Commedia*'s three autocitations. Chapter 2 addresses the question of Dante's changeable attitude towards the vernacular poets of the Sicilian school and the *stil nuovo* generation, and their relationship to his own "new style." Specifically she notes "Dante's urge to rewrite poetic history," which she sees in his exclusion from the *Commedia* of Guittone d'Arezzo and Guido Cavalcanti, who are both "poets Dante suspects of having been new before him." Instead Dante chooses to include less successful lyric poets in order to reinforce

his conviction that only epic poets can "combine eros with commitment, fusing the search for *salus* and *venus* into the search for *virtus*, and thereby becoming poets of rectitude."

Chapter 3, however, suggests that Dante believed that the classical epic poets had also failed in this task, Vergil first among them. Through an analysis of Dante's equivocal attitude towards his great epic predecessor, Barolini poses fundamental questions "regarding the status of Vergil's poem, and indeed . . . regarding textuality in general: questions of belief and disbelief, falsity and truth." She concludes the chapter by describing how Dante enlarges the scope of the term "comedia" to incorporate the concept of "poema sacro," thus allowing him, in his estimation and ours, to surpass the "tragedia" of his classical forebears while maintaining the humble attitude that he is merely a scribe recording Heaven's will.

Ample bibliographical references in the notes. Index. Appendix listing appearances of poets in all of Dante's works.

LD

Harold Bloom, ed. *Dante*. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. Pp. x + 216.

Bloom's anthology of Dante criticism, a new volume in the "Modern Critical Views" series, brings together fourteen articles written by North American scholars during the past 35 years. In the preface, the reader is advised that the essays fall into two categories. The first, which proposes to outline the contexts of the *Commedia*, includes Charles Singleton's "Two Kinds of Allegory," an abridged version of Erich Auerbach's seminal essay on "Figura" and his "St. Francis of Assisi in Dante's *Commedia*," Kaske's article on "Dante's DXV," and Francis Newman's work on the relationship of St. Augustine to the *Comedy*. The rest of the essays focus on individual episodes in the *Commedia* (Chiarenza, Freccero, Quint, Noakes, and Gross) or address themselves to problems of Dante's poetics and his relationship to other poets and his own earlier works (Durling, Freccero, Barolini). In a previously unpublished study, Giuseppe Mazzotta explores the limits and the dangers of rhetoric in the *Vita Nuova* and *Inferno* XXVII.

Bloom's introduction, written from the point of view of one who is not primarily a Dante scholar, discusses in particular the essays of Singleton, Auerbach, and Freccero, and outlines the debated issues of reality and truth in the *Commedia*, the problem of Beatrice, and the allegory of the theologians versus that of the poets.

This anthology, like its companion in the "Modern Critical Interpretations" series (1987) also edited by Bloom, is dominated by the "school of Freccero," and thus provides a useful if somewhat limited and partial view of American Dante criticism over the past three decades.

Chronology of the poet's life and work. Brief bibliography. Index.

LD

Anthony K. Cassell. *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto P, 1984. Pp. xiv + 186.

Cassell studies how the idea of the *contrapasso*, just retribution, functions in Dante's *Inferno*; how the figuration of the state of souls after death was designed by Dante to reveal God's justice, not through the establishment of a "hierarchy of punishment" but rather through the workings of a symbolic moral system in which punishment "is exquisitely apt and merited in each discrete case" (4). He also attempts to demonstrate how the representation of the damned, the relation of sin to punishment, is determined, to a great extent, by Dante's sources—not only classical, patristic, and scholastic but also "visual." (And, indeed, in at least three of his eight chapters he uses Christian iconography to help explicate the text.) Critically, Cassell locates himself within the Auerbach-Singleton approach to the *Commedia*, "which holds that the writer used both the biblical or theological system of fourfold allegory and the prefiguration-fulfillment pattern of history, the basis of which consisted in the various temporal epiphanies of Christ" (8).

The first chapter traces the concept of the *contrapasso* from Aristotle to St. Thomas and describes Dante's literary appropriation of this idea. The following chapters address specific episodes in the *Inferno*, including Farinata, Pier della Vigna, the *Gran Veggio*, the Idolators, Ulysses, and Satan. The chief aim in each case is "to discover the pattern which existed—that which joined sinner, sin, punishment, and imagery into an artistic whole" (5).

Extensive end-notes. Index. Thirty-four black and white plates of iconographic sources.

PR

Paolo Cherchi and Antonio C. Mastrobuono, eds. *Lectura Dantis Newberryana*. Vol. 1. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1988. Pp. vii + 198.

The eight articles published in this volume were presented at the first two yearly series of the "lectura Newberryana" in Chicago, 1983–1985. The topics represent a variety of subjects and approaches.

Nicolae Iliescu demonstrates in "The Roman Emperors in *The Divine Comedy*" that from the standpoint not of human history but of revealed history the figures of the great Roman emperors function as instruments of the divine will. Mario Trovato proposes in "Dante and the Tradition of the 'Two Beatitudes'" that Dante's theories on the purpose of human

life expressed in both the *Convivio* and *De Monarchia* "must be located within the parameters set by Albert [the Great] and Thomas [Aquinas]" (27). By following the play of metaphor which centres around the contrast of *acerbo/maturo* (ripe/unripe), Davy A. Carozza traces "The Motif of Maturation in the *Commedia*." In "'Il cantor de' bucolici carmi': The Influence of Virgilian Pastoral on Dante's Depiction of the Earthly Paradise," Caron Ann Cioffi shows how Dante modifies classical pastoral in order to harmonize it with the sense of hope in God's grace which accompanies Christian rebirth. In "Poetics of Renewal and Hagiographic Tradition in the *Vita Nuova*," Vittore Branca relates the "itinerarium mentis in Dominum" of the Franciscans to Dante's progress from *amore-passione* to *amore-carità*. Antonio C. Mastrobuono, in "The Powerful Enigma," explores the significance of the "Velro" and the "Cinquecento diece e cinque" (which he proposes should be translated into the figure of a cross) in order to establish the Christian extent of Dante's philosophy of history.

Two essays examine the role of Statius in the *Commedia*: "Virgil, Statius, and Dante: An Unusual Trinity," in which Christopher Kleinhenz interprets Dante's Statius as the author of the morally allegorical *Thebaid* (as interpreted in the Middle Ages); "Dante and the *Thebaid* of Statius," in which Winthrop Wetherbee interprets Dante's Statius as the author of his own *Thebaid*, a work which Dante perceives as arresting and transcending ongoing disaster with visionary moments and as exposing the inhumanity of traditional religion.

Notes after each essay. Illustrations after the essays by Cioffi and Mastrobuono.

CLM

James Dauphiné. *Le cosmos de Dante*. Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1984. Pp. 214.

James Dauphiné's book (drawn in part from his 1981 doctoral dissertation) explores Dante's concept of the universe, with particular emphasis on the *Divine Comedy*. His primary objective is to consider "l'oeuvre de Dante du point de vue particulier de ses implications cosmologiques" (7) in order to provide "une modeste contribution à la compréhension de la vision poétique du cosmos dans l'oeuvre dantesque" (8).

The first three chapters examine Dante's classical, theological, and scientific sources with the intention of clarifying the relationship between the temporal and spatial structures of the journey, especially the process of the pilgrim's ascension in the *Paradiso*. The final chapter, entitled "Poétique et imagination" deals with the creative act itself, with how imagination is transformed into language. Dauphiné sees Dante's poem as an "aventure stylistique" in which the poet meditates on "le pouvoir des mots," on the ability of language to make the spiritual domain accessible to man. The

author concludes by affirming that "la poésie du cosmos et la glorification de la puissance divine s'accomplissent grâce à une réflexion sur l'écriture et la théologie."

The book also contains four appendices: two are dedicated to some of Dante's predecessors (e.g. Ristoro d'Arezzo and Bonvesin de la Riva); the other two ("Dante et la signature des étoiles" and "Dante et l'Odyssée: forme et signification") take up the discourse of his last chapter.

Notes. Index of names.

LB

Bernard Delmay. *I personaggi della Divina Commedia: Classificazione e regesto*. Firenze: Olschki, 1986. Pp. 414.

In this volume Delmay lists and classifies all the characters who appear in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. First, he explains how his various categories and sub-categories work. Delmay distinguishes three main groups of characters: A. those present to the action, B. those cited, and C. those given as speaking examples (in *Purgatory*). Characters present to the action are sub-divided into the following groups: 1. those who speak, 2. those who are silent, and 3. those who are entelechies or symbolic personifications (both in human and non-human form). The second set of characters, those who are cited, are divided in turn according to whether they are named by 1. Dante the narrator, 2. Dante the pilgrim, 3. Virgil, 4. Beatrice, 5. Cacciaguida, or, 6. other spirits. Delmay also indicates whether the character is historical, mythohistorical, mythological, or a pure spirit. A list of abbreviations and a brief bibliography are included in the volume.

An alphabetical list of all the characters in the *Divine Comedy* forms the main body of the text (280 entries in all). Each entry gives the origin, history, and main characteristics of a character. Francesca da Rimini, to give an example, is in group A1-S (a historical character, in action, who speaks). We are also told where she lived, what her family origins were, how she came to love Paolo, what her sin was, and where she is located in Dante's gallery of the afterworld.

Delmay's book is a useful tool which offers quick access to essential information about every character in the *Divine Comedy*.

AST

Peter Dronke. *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions*. London: Cambridge UP, 1986. Pp. xiii + 153.

Placing himself in the company of Auerbach (figural approach) and Nardi (neo-Platonic approach), Dronke argues that it is possible, through a consideration of medieval modes of understanding metaphor, to derive ana-

lytical approaches to Dante that are both more subtle than "allegorical" analyses and probably truer to Dante's intention. He stresses the concept of "open meanings" in imagery and also explores medieval poetic ideas in which imagery functions neither to "hide" nor to adorn meaning, but rather to create meaning: "imagery consubstantial with meaning." He outlines his approach in the first chapter and, in succeeding chapters, employs it in an analysis of several moments in the *Commedia* which he considers exemplary of the "medieval Latin imaginative world in which Dante lived": the giants in hell (Chapter 2), the "phantasmagoria" in the earthly paradise (Chapter 3), and the first circle in the solar heaven (Chapter 4). Throughout his "method is to begin from Dante himself, trying to ascertain what imagery he might, historically, have known, and how he has transfixed it" (ix).

In the two Excursus which conclude the volume, Dronke seeks to clarify, with documentation, the controversy surrounding the authorship of the *Epistle* to Can Grande, (concluding that Dante probably did not compose the expository part of the letter) and to set out the medieval Latin tradition of the legend of Nimrod the astronomer.

Brief bibliographical note. Index. Excellent end-notes, into which he unfortunately too often consigns intriguing arguments that should be in the body of the text, e.g. note 8 to Chapter 1, on the prophetic tradition.

FB

Joan M. Ferrante. *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984. Pp. ix + 392.

Without reducing the *Comedy* to a political tract, Ferrante reads Dante's poem from a socio-political perspective. Indeed, she suggests that the political attitudes in the poem are consistent with those of the *Monarchy* and the *Convivio*, but in the *Comedy* Dante elected to express his views in verse in order to give them persuasive force and to ensure popular circulation. The first two chapters address problems of city and empire, church and state, respectively. Ferrante reads the *Inferno* (Chapter 3) as a metaphor of a corrupt society, "when all its members act for themselves and against the common good." *Purgatory* (Chapter 4) figures "a society in transition, moving from self-centeredness to concern for and commitment to others, but not yet organized within an effective structure." *Paradiso* (Chapter 5) is the "ideal society in all its essential elements working harmoniously." The concluding chapter explains the problems of exchange and communication, and describes how Dante "accepts commerce as an essential part of life in a complex society, as a basic form of exchange, like language, though vulnerable to the same kinds of control." Ferrante surveys medieval attitudes towards "usurers" of both money and language, both forms of exchange open to willful "corruption" (by counterfeiters and

moneylenders or, by analogy, liars and poets), and she shows how Dante's preoccupation with problems of reference leads him to adopt the kind of neologistic, often self-contradictory poetic language found in *Paradise*, a language designed to transcend "the limitations of material values and goods . . . by giving financial terms a metaphorical meaning, by turning the commercial perspective from profit and loss in money to gains in love and knowledge" (379).

Extensive footnotes. Index.

PR

John Freccero. *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*. Edited with Introduction by Rachel Jacoff. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1986. Pp. xvi + 328.

This volume collects all of Freccero's major essays on the *Divine Comedy* published over a 25 year period (1959–84). The essays, most of which are on the *Inferno* (11 out of 17), are essentially unrevised and are arranged to follow the order of the *Commedia*'s narrative movement rather than their dates of publication. Thus, we move from "The Prologue Scene" (1966) to "The Final Image: *Paradiso* XXXIII, 144" (1964), two early essays characterized by the techniques of traditional historical research and a belief in the "interpretability" of Dante's text. Later essays, starting with "Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit" (1972), are more speculative in nature and regularly call into question the ability of language to represent and to mean. Given the collection's organizing principles, the reader is obliged to shift continually between two radically different critical perspectives.

Clearly, the volume's unity is not to be found in methodological coherence. Rather it resides in Freccero's preoccupation with the notion of "conversion," in his belief that a conversion experience lies at the heart of Dante's poem, and more specifically that Dante's model for his conversion narrative is St. Augustine's *Confessions*. As the editor points out in her introduction, conversion is to be "understood both as religious experience and as poetic structure" (xii). In one of his most recent essays, "The Significance of *Terza Rima*" (1983), Freccero expands the idea of conversion to include the dialectic between thematics and poetics; "thematics (that is, theology) and poetics might conceivably be joined in such a way as to offend neither historical understanding nor contemporary skepticism, for, in both cases, we are discussing a coherence that is primarily linguistic. The traditional problem of poetry and belief would then be shifted onto a philosophical plane. Does the order of language reflect the order of reality or is 'transcendent reality' simply a projection of language? What we had always taken to be a problem of Dante criticism turns out to be the central epistemological problem of all interpretation" (260).



Extensive notes in early essays. **Index** of cantos and verses. General index.

PR

Jesse M. Gellrich. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985. Pp. 292.

Gellrich defines the medieval "idea of the book" as a "particular form" of the "larger, mythologizing phenomenon of Western tradition" (20). Mythology, in this context, signifies "a specific structure of thought" which informs the encyclopedic and totalizing organization of cultural form. From Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Foucault comes the seminal concept of the Text fulfilling "certain expectations that mythology supplied in archaic cultures" (18). In Chapter 2, the author examines medieval efforts to contain sacred meaning in structured space (or its mimesis): in architecture, visual art, cartography, and the schematic structure of Scholastic thought and music. In Chapter 3, he chronicles, from Augustine to Aquinas, the ongoing effort to protect signification from indeterminacy, to mythologize the signs of writing and speaking.

In Chapter 1, since "discussions about writing in the middle ages may very well turn out to confront modern deconstruction with its own history" (31), Gellrich places in juxtaposition Derrida's distinction between "writing" (*écriture*) and the conception of the Book as a "natural totality," and Augustine's "distinction between writing and the celestial Book" (which leads to the medieval fascination with "the presence of one in the other," 35). In his chapters on Dante (4) and Chaucer (5-7), the author undertakes what he describes as "a new look at the place of fiction within the encompassing Text of medieval cultural forms" (23). Dante's innovation (which is modest in relation to Chaucer's emphatic "play" with the indeterminacy of the text) consists of his use in the *Commedia* of language as *interpretative* of spiritual experience rather than as *imitative* of the Book of creation or the Book of culture. Gellrich concludes that "the allegories of reading in Dante and Chaucer open the way for rereading" (247).

Extensive bibliography. Index. Nine full-page, black and white illustrations.

CLM

Luciana Giovanetti. *Dante in America: Bibliografia 1965-1980*. Ravenna: Longo, 1987. Pp. 197.

Giovanetti's bibliography of Dante studies in America for the period 1965-1980 bears witness to the varied and widespread interest Dante continues

to generate on this side of the Atlantic. Since many older works on the Italian poet were reprinted during this period, virtually all the protagonists of American Dante criticism from Longfellow on are represented. In the introduction, Giovanetti declares modestly that her bibliography is designed primarily for students (both Italian and American) who are venturing into the field of Dante studies for the first time. However, established scholars will profit from it as a work of consultation as much as students will.

The bibliography is especially useful because the entries (1522 in all) are listed under 13 different headings rather than arranged chronologically. The headings are 1) Concordanze, dizionari, bibliografie; 2) Opere introduttive generali; 3) Volumi collettivi; 4) La vita e i tempi di Dante; 5) La cultura e le fonti di Dante; 6) L'ideologia dantesca; 7) Allegoria e allegorismo; 8) La struttura e le strutture; 9) Arte e tecnica in Dante; 10) *Lecturae Dantis*; 11) Le epoche dell'esegesi e della fortuna di Dante; 12) Dante nella letteratura comparata; 13) Edizioni e traduzioni.

Each heading is divided under several subheadings. This arrangement has the obvious advantage of clustering together studies on relatively well-defined topics. However, it also gives the uninitiated a sense of the critical issues debated during the 15-year span. Finally, Giovanetti provides a brief but useful introduction to the material contained in each section.

Index of periodicals and of names.

AST

Robert Pogue Harrison. *The Body of Beatrice*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins UP, 1988. Pp. 200.

Placing his study of Dante's *Vita Nuova* outside the theological approach of Singleton and the philological approach of De Robertis, Harrison adopts a phenomenological stance, one which "attempts to go directly 'to the thing itself'" (4). In the first part of his study ("Beatrice Alive"), Harrison interrogates the nature of the *presence* of Beatrice; he proposes a correlation "between the body of Beatrice and *intendimento*, or meaning," which, he claims, "runs implicitly throughout the *Vita Nuova*" (29). Harrison then proceeds to demonstrate the manner in which Dante (in contradistinction to the poetics of Guido Cavalcanti) incorporates, by means of aesthetic transfiguration, the animation of Beatrice's presence into the new life of his poetry, bringing about an ideal fusion of inspiration and intellection.

The second part ("Beatrice Dead") demonstrates that the *absence* of Beatrice leads Dante (after he has resisted a Petrarchan temptation to pursue elegaic lyric) to the discovery of another dimension of time, beyond "the lyric circle of incorporation," in which the ultimate source of "meaning" attends upon the future. The *Vita Nuova*, Harrison claims, is a testimony of this discovery; it becomes "a story of the genesis of narrative possibility" (94), which is the precondition of epic. Thus the *Vita Nuova*

"probes the preconditions of both Dante's lyric past and his epic future" (166).

Illuminating, well documented endnotes. Index of passages cited. General index.

CLM

Eric Haywood and Barry Jones, eds. *Dante Comparisons. Comparative Studies of Dante and Montale, Foscolo, Tasso, Chaucer, Petrarch, Propertius and Catullus*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1985. Pp. 154.

Dedicated to the memory of David Nolan, late Professor of Italian at University College Dublin, this is the third collection based on the annual series of Dante lectures which Nolan inaugurated. Within the comparative approach, there is a varied range of perspectives represented in the six articles.

Z. Barański's "Dante and Montale: the Threads of Influence" contains an appendix listing all the borrowings of Montale from Dante. Thomas Finan, in "Catullus, Propertius and the *Vita Nuova*," considers two Latin poets (along with a third—Ovid) as influences on the Courtly Love tradition, and so on the *Vita Nuova*. Gerald Morgan, in "Dante, Chaucer, and the Meaning of Love," is concerned with the influence of Dante upon Chaucer, obvious but in his opinion "underestimated," in Chaucer's treatment of love, particularly in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Nolan's posthumous contribution, derived by the editors from notes, compares elements in common in "Dante and Tasso," including the "voyage" and the "evil counselor" motifs. Tom O'Neill, in "Foscolo and Dante," is concerned with Foscolo as a perceptive and sensitive critic of Dante. Finally, Jennifer Petrie, in "Dante and Petrarch," contends that Dante's influence on Petrarch has usually been vastly understated, especially by Petrarch himself, who was "more of a pupil of Dante than he cared to admit."

Notes after each paper. Index of Dante references. Index of names.

FB

Amilcare A. Iannucci. *Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia*. Roma: Bulzoni, 1984. Pp. 194.

This volume brings together five essays with similar concerns and methodological focus published over a ten year period (1973–1983). They have been translated into Italian and completely revised in order to fit into the conceptual framework of the book, which explores the concepts of "forma" and "evento" in the *Divine Comedy* and the relationship of dependency that exists between the two in the poem. More specifically, Iannucci attempts

to show how Dante's concept of history determines the various forms his text assumes, whether they be stylistic, dramatic, narrative, or exegetical. Indeed, the subject of one of the essays ("Autoesegesi dantesca") deals precisely with this last formal category of Dante's text, a text, according to Iannucci, which "... contiene e genera strutture che rivelano—o meglio aiutano a rivelare—il suo proprio significato" (8).

The various essays, therefore, deal with different aspects of the same problem, which also inevitably involves the question of Dante's sources, regardless of their origin: theological (the harrowing of hell), "visual" (the iconography of Kronos-Saturn), or literary (the Homeric Ulysses). These sources, once they enter Dante's Christian poetic universe, are radically transformed. For instance, according to Iannucci, by shifting the poetic focus in his representation of Limbo from those whom Christ liberated at the harrowing (the Hebrew fathers) to those who were left behind (the virtuous pagans), Dante created in *Inferno* 4 one of the most dramatic and compelling episodes in the entire *Commedia*.

Methodologically, Iannucci defines his approach as "storico-formalistico," and indeed throughout he studies the formal structures of the poem both in relation to Dante's concept of history and within the wider cultural context of his time. This approach is particularly evident in the last essay ("Il 'folle volo' di Ulisse: il peso della storia"), which shows how Dante transforms the Greek hero "da un eroe della 'forma' in un eroe dell'evento" (9).

Bibliographic note. Extensive end-notes. Index of names.

LB

Roberto Mercuri. *Semantica di Gerione*. Roma: Bulzoni, 1984. Pp. 270.

Mercuri believes "che esistono dei luoghi privilegiati nella *Commedia*" not only at the level of *dispositio* but also at the level of *inventio* and *elocutio*: "che possiamo definire come 'cruces,' caratterizzate da oscurità, da azioni, temi non immediatamente assimilabili dal recettore ma che, al contrario, provocano l'accensione del dubbio, della perplessità, costituendo un 'ictus' certo voluto, nel circuito della comunicazione" (5). One of these places is the Geryon episode: "episodio tanto più cruciale in quanto l'incontro con Gerione è introdotto da un appello al lettore in cui appaiono dominanti le funzioni fatica e metalinguistica, volte a rinsaldare il contatto con il lettore e a mettere a punto il messaggio e il codice" (5-6).

*Semantica di Gerione* (whose subtitle is "Il motivo del viaggio nella *Commedia*") uses the Geryon episode as a constant point of reference to study the underlying structural patterns of Dante's poem. In particular, Mercuri explores (making recourse to scriptural texts) the various semantic possibilities of the word "corda" ("corda" as *cingulum*, *rudens*, *laqueus*,

rete, etc.) to achieve this end: "l'immagine metaforica della corda scandisce i tempi e le battute, le tappe del viaggio" (45).

Methodologically, he claims that his book is "la registrazione di una prova di approccio plurimetodologico, di un clic ermeneutico che tenta di integrare lettura e interpretazione, cioè di decodificare . . . il testo medioevale secondo il nostro sistema e tuttavia senza anacronismo" (12).

Extensive annotation. Index of names.

EV

Silvio Pasquazi. *D'Egitto in Ierusalemme. Studi danteschi*. Roma: Bulzoni, 1985. Pp. 221.

This volume collects Pasquazi's Dante essays published between 1972 and 1985. They all deal with either an infernal or a paradisaical subject (the prologue, Virgil, Ulysses, Lucifer, *Paradiso* 9, and Saint Francis), with the exception of a long, previously unpublished piece on Dante's cosmogony. The title (as the author himself tells us in the "Avvertenza") was chosen to indicate a continuity in interest and exegetical method between the essays in this volume and those included in an earlier work entitled *All'eterno dal tempo* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1972). He goes on to suggest the nature of his interest in Dante's poem and the focus his enquiry will take: "la natura e il mondo in quanto realtà positiva costituiscono, come pensava il Medioevo, una sorta di rivelazione divina, e quindi non creano antinomia rispetto all'eternità; è però anche vero . . . che nel mondo umano, come il Poeta lo vede dal suo osservatorio escatologico, si svolge un dramma cui partecipano il cielo e la terra, e nel quale la giustizia si realizza e si perfeziona attraverso l'indefettibile testimonianza e il generoso combattimento: le quali cose sembrano meglio rappresentate nell'antitesi 'Egitto/Ierusalemme'" (11-12).

The essay on Dante's cosmogony takes up the problem of Dante's apparent contradictory account of the creation of the world in the *Comedy* (and *Inferno* 34 in particular) and the *Questio de aqua et terra*. Pasquazi concludes, in part, that ". . . relativamente alla formazione del continente boreale, *Questio* e *Inf.* XXXIV non si contraddicono ma si completano, in quanto nella *Questio* viene indicata la causa efficiente (chi tragga il continente sopra le acque), mentre in *Inf.* XXXIV, senza far questione della causa efficiente, ne espone la causa materiale" (153). He includes an impressive comparative chronological table outlining the days of creation according to Gen. 1.1-31, Apoc. 12.4, 7-9, 12, *Inf.* 34.121-126, *Par.* 7.130-138, *Par.* 29.16-54, and *Questio* 72-76 in order to support his claims.

Notes. Index of names.

LB

Giorgio Petrocchi. *Vita di Dante*. Bari: Laterza, 1986. Pp. 241

In his *Vita di Dante*, Giorgio Petrocchi attempts to reconstruct "in maniera completa e organica la vicenda umana, politica e letteraria del poeta." He does this by alternating purely biographical chapters with chapters dealing specifically with one or more of Dante's literary works from *Il Fiore* (which he believes along with Contini to have been written by Dante around 1286) to the *Paradiso*. Throughout he makes frequent reference to his previously published works on Dante, in particular to his "Biografia di Dante" in volume 6 of the *Enciclopedia dantesca* (Rome 1978, pp. 1-53) and to *Itinerari danteschi* (Bari 1969), where many of the problematic issues which he mentions in the present biography (obviously written for the general, intelligent reader) are treated in much greater detail.

In this sense, *Vita di Dante* is a kind of summary (without exhaustive argumentation) of many of the conclusions concerning various aspects of Dante's life and works which Petrocchi has reached over a long period of time. For instance, concerning the date and place of composition of the *Commedia*'s three *cantiche*, he states: "Una cronologia particolareggiata sarà sempre impossibile, ma individuare due grandi isole di lavoro, Lucca per l'*Inferno*, Casentino per il *Purgatorio*, dovrà essere ritenuto con sufficiente approssimazione un punto fermo nella genesi della *Commedia*" (155). Moreover, according to Petrocchi, the *Inferno* was begun in 1304 and published "nella seconda metà del 1314." On the other hand, Dante started to write the *Purgatorio* in 1308 and published it "nell'autunno del 1315" (147, 190). As for the *Paradiso*, it was begun around 1316 in Verona (190).

"Bibliografia Essenziale." Index of names.

EV

Michelangelo Picone, ed. *Dante e le forme dell'allegoresi*. Ravenna: Longo, 1987. Pp. 173.

All of the essays in this volume deal, in one way or another, with the vexed question of Dante and allegory, and more specifically that kind of allegory which the author calls the "allegory of the theologians." To be sure, this is a subject which has not been neglected by recent Dante criticism. One thinks immediately, as Picone himself points out in the introduction, of Auerbach's "figural realism" and Singleton's "biblical allegory." However, the essays in this collection shift the critical ground somewhat: their interest is not so much ideological as it is methodological and textual. They focus on allegory not as a figure Dante uses to authenticate the poem's religious and prophetic message, but rather as an exegetical device, as a technique for reading and interpreting texts, Dante's texts in particular. More specifically, the objective of the collection "è quello di verificare i

limiti di applicabilità al poema dantesco delle pratiche esegetiche e delle tecniche ermeneutiche che venivano riservate nel Medioevo allo studio della Bibbia (e ben presto estese anche allo studio degli *auctores*), e che possiamo riunire sotto la denominazione generale di 'allegoresi'" (8).

The essays can be divided into three separate groups. The first examines the semiotic (M. Corti), rhetorical (G.C. Alessio) and cultural (E. Costa) context within which Dante's theory of allegory evolved. The second group explores Dante's actual practice of allegory in his major creative works: the *Vita Nuova* (M. Picone), the *Convivio* (A. D'Andrea), and the *Commedia* (Z. Barański and A.A. Iannucci). The final two essays study the reception of Dante's allegory, both iconographical (J.I. Friedman) and literary (G. Caravaggi). By privileging method over idea, textual practice over theory, this volume fills a lacuna in contemporary Dante studies and at the same time brings into sharper focus the polysemous nature of the poet's work.

Index of names and of manuscripts.

AST

Domenico Pietropaolo. *Dante Studies in the Age of Vico*. Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1989. Pp. 392.

Pietropaolo's study focuses on critics of Dante in the last three decades of the seventeenth century and the first three of the eighteenth; it deals with considerations both of an extra-textual nature, and of literary ideology. The divisions of this study coincide with the geographical identification of four cultural provinces (the southern critics, Rome and the papal states, the northern scholars, and Tuscany). In each division an introduction which places the regional critics within an historically defined intellectual context is followed by close, individual analyses of their writings. This format allows both for an assessment of the theoretical and methodological development of individual critics, and for a perspective of the diverse ideological developments of Dante criticism in the larger geographical and historical milieu.

As his title suggests, Pietropaolo (here, for the first time) places Vico (whose position in the text is not privileged) within the critical context of his own era, bringing to the fore scholars whose contributions to Dante criticism have previously been ignored or given only cursory study. Pietropaolo demonstrates that "in the specific field of Dante criticism" Vico's contemporaries "are not unworthy of his company and cannot be made to disappear in his shadow" (386).

Notes following each chapter document sources. An appendix gives editorial data on editions of Dante's works available during the period studied.

CLM

Jacqueline Risset. *Dante scrittore*. Trad. Marina Galletti con la collaborazione dell'autore. Milan: Mondadori, 1984. Pp. xi + 191.

This work is a translation of *Dante écrivain ou l'Intelletto d'amore* published by the Éditions du Seuil in 1982. In the preface we are informed that *Dante scrittore* "nasce in origine nella prospettiva del lettore francese" (ix). Dante, through Gustave Doré's nineteenth century illustrations, has been considered "poussièreux" and Risset proposes to remove the "dust" that, with time, has accumulated on Dante's work. She writes, therefore, not for a scholarly audience: *Dante scrittore* "vuole soprattutto mettere sotto gli occhi di chi legge e scrive oggi il passaggio, come su uno schermo mobile, di quel 'foglio bianco travagliato dai segni neri' descritto dall'egloga a Giovanni di Virgilio" (xi).

Risset sees Dante's *Divina Commedia* as "un enigma che non cessa di interrogarci," and claims in the brief introductory chapter entitled "Enigma" that "un simile testo non può ridursi ad una interpretazione, poiché è esso stesso movimento incessante di interpretazione . . . per questo il testo dantesco . . . sopraffà ogni metodo globale d'analisi" (6). For her the key to unlock the text's secret resides in the creative act itself, in the act of writing.

The rest of the book follows the evolution of *Dante scrittore* within the context of the medieval literary tradition in order to demonstrate the self-conscious programme of poetic renewal Dante attempted. All of his works are discussed from *Il Fiore* ("la scrittura del *Fiore* si può dire logicamente inclusa nel programma di Dante scrittore—ovvero di un grande costruttore poetico, e di un insaziabile sperimentatore nella lingua," 36) to the *Vita Nuova*, the *Rime*, the treatises, and finally the *Commedia* itself.

Two appendices discuss 1. Dante's fortunes, or rather, misfortunes in France ("Storia di un'assenza"); and, 2. the problems connected with the translation of Dante's work into French ("Tradurre").

Endnotes. Index.

EV

Vittorio Russo. *Il romanzo teologico. Sondaggio sulla Commedia di Dante*. Napoli: Liguori, 1984. Pp. 194.

This volume collects Russo's essays on Dante written over a five year period (1978–1983). All of the essays (both the more theoretical ones of the first part and those dedicated to a close reading of specific cantos of the second part) are held together by the belief that the *Commedia* should be assigned to the literary genre of the novel, or, more precisely, that Dante's *poema sacro* should be seen ". . . come opera di trapasso dall'epopea al romanzo o come archetipo del genere principe della tradizione letteraria borghese, in particolare di quel filone in esso più significativo, designato



poi come *Bildungsroman* o *roman d'apprentissage*. La *Commedia*, appunto, come 'storia di una ricerca di valori autentici,' per la ricostruzione della totalità etica frantumata, ad opera di un protagonista che si pone in maniera problematica e antagonistica di fronte alla degradazione del mondo" (29).

Russo articulates and develops this critical position within the context of the writings on Dante and, more generally, on the theory of the novel, by such scholars as Battaglia, Bakhtin, Lukács, Goldmann, and Girard. His readings of *Inferno* 22, *Purgatorio* 23, and *Paradiso* 19 in the second part of the book aim, therefore, to bring into focus the linguistic, stylistic, and narrative elements of Dante's poem which relate it most to the novel, and, in particular, the poem's "plurilinguismo" and its "enciclopedismo di tematiche disparate e di diverse forme espressive" (95). In this light, it is clear that the phrase "romanzo teologico" of the title should be understood literally and not in the Crocean sense which is explicitly rejected.

Bibliography of works cited in the notes. Index of names.

LB

Jeffrey T. Schnapp. *The Transfiguration of History at the Center of Dante's Paradise*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986. Pp. 268.

Schnapp proposes to "show the full extent to which the central cantos of *Paradiso* may be regarded as Dante's Christian response to the dilemma of *Inferno* 4." In this effort, he presents a detailed discussion of the Virgilian conception of history as seen in *Aeneid* 6, its relation to Florentine history, and the cross of lights in cantos 14–18, which he interprets as the symbol of Dante's Christian solution to the limitations of the classical world.

In Chapter 1, the author sets out the dialectic between history and eternity, a recurring theme in his book. Drawing parallels among *Aeneid* 6, Cicero's *Republic* (Book 6) and the *Paradiso*, he notes that in each a father tries to convince a son to undertake an epic task in order to escape from cyclical history. Chapter 2 concentrates on the figure of Mars as the negative and controlling force of classical history, the god who condemns cities such as Rome to an unending cycle of ascension, corruption, fall, and regeneration. Relating Dante's Florence to Virgil's Rome, Chapter 3 argues that the cross is the means by which the cyclic pattern of history may be transcended. Appropriately, therefore, Cacciaguida utters his imperatives to Dante in *Paradiso* 17 from the cross of light, a figure of Christ who significantly replaces the sun with his own light in the heaven of Mars. Virgil's tragedy—and the limitations of the ancients—was that they could not recognize Christ as the means to another history, one which would solve "the dilemma of history under the destabilizing rule of Mars," not through deification, but transfiguration, i.e. eschatology.

Schnapp's final chapter supports his interpretation with an analysis of the apsidal mosaics in Sant'Appollinare in Classe (accompanied by 22 black and white plates). Calling them a "unique fusion of the iconography of the Exaltation of the Cross and of Christ's Transfiguration," he suggests that they may have been the inspiration not only for the idea of Dante's cross of light, but also for his placement of it in the structure of the *Paradiso* and, by extension, its significance as a symbol of the transfiguration which will occur at the apocalypse.

Extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Index to passages cited from Dante's works. Subject index.

LD

J. F. Took. *L'Eterno Piacer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. Pp. xii + 128.

In an effort to discover a "Dantean philosophy of beauty," Took considers Dante's general aesthetics, the aesthetics of art in Dante, and his conception of literary beauty, with particular emphasis on the relationship of the moral and aesthetic in his works and the aesthetic of allegory. He elucidates his discussion of Dante's general aesthetics by further subdividing his study into five moments of aesthetic experience: the formal and metaphysical (the objective) properties of beauty, and the psychological, moral, and affective aspects which categorize the subjective experience of beauty.

According to Took, aesthetics is about "the nature and origin of beauty in the sensible world" and a conscious aesthetic informs the work of Dante and other medieval writers. His objective is to analyse an extensive number of passages in Dante's works, with a view to uncovering Dante's appreciation of proportion, his "theology of beauty," and his psychology of beauty (in which he suggests that "symmetry satisfies a yearning in the mind, a connatural affinity for harmony"). Methodologically, the author claims his book is historical and philosophical rather than literary-critical in conception, since "it sets out to define the *rationes* of beauty in Dante in the light of such principles as would have been familiar to a poet and philosopher of his day" (ix). In other words, it is a comparative study of medieval ideas about beauty, with Dante as the principal figure of interest.

Extensive annotation. Select bibliography. Analytical index.

FB

Jeremy Trampling. *Dante and Difference: Writing in the Commedia*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. Pp. ix + 206.

In this volume, the second in the "Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature," Trampling distinguishes himself from those critics who search for unity and univocity within the text; he seeks instead to demonstrate its polysemy: just as the past is constantly being rewritten, so "does the *Commedia* re-write itself as it goes on, and so does Dante's whole life, as expressed in art, become re-written time and again" (6). Part one demonstrates, while dealing with Dante's rewriting of other texts, that the *Commedia* both "declares its own refusal of closure" and draws attention to itself as a fictionalization, as a system of writing. Part two proposes (in Derridian terminology) that each *cantica* rewrites the one before it. The *Purgatorio* becomes a critical rewriting and rethinking of the *Inferno*, whose theme is the reduction of signification and whose end is silence. In the *Purgatorio* "poetic desire takes the form of looking for significance, rather than overt meaning, and thus opens up the text as a space for new and surprising insights" (96). This leads to "the world that bursts with meaning" described in *Paradiso* 26.16–18 (78).

In part three the author argues "that the *Commedia* is not offering itself as a single, separate, autonomous work," but rather that it is "an episode in a book" (129); that Dante's texts work against one another, conveying a sense "that the whole life is a book to be rewritten" (132). By refusing to identify with the past, the *Commedia* makes the past subserve not only the present but also the future.

Endnotes. Select bibliography. Index to Dante's works. Index of names.

CLM



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# Rassegna bibliografica 1984-88

## ELENCO DEGLI ACRONIMI PER ORDINE ALFABETICO

<i>ABI</i>	<i>Accademie e Biblioteche d'Italia</i>
<i>AdI</i>	<i>Annali d'Italianistica</i>
<i>AION-SI</i>	<i>Annali Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli, Sezione Romanza</i>
<i>AL</i>	<i>American Literature</i>
<i>ALitASH</i>	<i>Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
<i>ASNSP</i>	<i>Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Classe di Lettere e Filosofia</i>
<i>ATI</i>	<i>Association of Teachers of Italian Journal</i>
<i>ATQ</i>	<i>American Transcendental Quarterly</i>
<i>BioC</i>	<i>Biologia Culturale</i>
<i>C&amp;L</i>	<i>Christianity and Literature</i>
<i>CanL</i>	<i>Canadian Literature</i>
<i>Carl</i>	<i>Carte Italiane</i>
<i>CCIEP</i>	<i>Courrier du Centre International d'Études Poétiques</i>
<i>CCrit</i>	<i>Comparative Criticism</i>
<i>ChauR</i>	<i>The Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism</i>
<i>CJItS</i>	<i>Canadian Journal of Italian Studies</i>
<i>CJPhil</i>	<i>Canadian Journal of Philosophy</i>
<i>CLAJ</i>	<i>College Language Association Journal</i>
<i>CLS</i>	<i>Comparative Literature Studies</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>The Cambridge Quarterly</i>
<i>CRCL</i>	<i>Canadian Review of Comparative Literature</i>
<i>CrL</i>	<i>Critica Letteraria</i>
<i>DAI</i>	<i>Dissertation Abstracts International</i>
<i>DDJ</i>	<i>Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch</i>
<i>DS</i>	<i>Dante Studies</i>
<i>EL</i>	<i>Esperienze Letterarie</i>
<i>EP</i>	<i>Études Philosophiques</i>
<i>ESJ</i>	<i>European Studies Journal</i>
<i>Exp</i>	<i>Explicator</i>
<i>FeC</i>	<i>Filologia e Critica</i>
<i>FI</i>	<i>Forum Italicum</i>
<i>GIF</i>	<i>Giornale Italiano di Filologia</i>
<i>GSLI</i>	<i>Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana</i>
<i>HumB</i>	<i>Humanitas: Rivista di Cultura (Brescia)</i>

<i>IBP</i>	<i>Italian Books and Periodicals: Quarterly Book Review</i>
<i>IQ</i>	<i>Italian Quarterly</i>
<i>IRLI</i>	<i>Italianistica: Rivista di Letteratura Italiana</i>
<i>IS</i>	<i>Italian Studies</i>
<i>ItC</i>	<i>Italian Culture</i>
<i>ItS</i>	<i>Italienische Studien</i>
<i>JARAAS</i>	<i>Journal of American Romance Academy of Arts &amp; Sciences</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JRMRA</i>	<i>Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association</i>
<i>KJ</i>	<i>The Kipling Journal</i>
<i>KRQ</i>	<i>Kentucky Romance Quarterly</i>
<i>KSJ</i>	<i>Keats-Shelley Journal: Keats, Shelley, Byron, Hunt, and their Circles.</i>
<i>L&amp;B</i>	<i>Literature &amp; Belief</i>
<i>LCl</i>	<i>Lecture Classensi</i>
<i>LD</i>	<i>Lectura Dantis</i>
<i>LDN</i>	<i>Lectura Dantis Newberryana</i>
<i>LeL</i>	<i>Lingua e Letteratura</i>
<i>LI</i>	<i>Lettere Italiane</i>
<i>LIC</i>	<i>Letteratura Italiana Contemporanea</i>
<i>LN</i>	<i>Lingua Nostra</i>
<i>LRB</i>	<i>London Review of Books</i>
<i>M&amp;H</i>	<i>Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture</i>
<i>MDDG</i>	<i>Mitteilungsblatt der Deutschen Dante-Gesellschaft</i>
<i>MedR</i>	<i>Medioevo Romanzo</i>
<i>MisC</i>	<i>Misure Critiche</i>
<i>MiscFr</i>	<i>Miscellanea Franceseana: Rivista Trimestrale di Scienze Teologiche e di Studi Francescani</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>MLS</i>	<i>Modern Language Studies</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>MRTS</i>	<i>Medieval &amp; Renaissance Texts &amp; Studies</i>
<i>NA</i>	<i>Nuova Antologia</i>
<i>NCo</i>	<i>Nuova Corrente</i>
<i>NeuM</i>	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>N&amp;Q</i>	<i>Notes &amp; Queries</i>
<i>NRS</i>	<i>Nuova Rivista Storica</i>
<i>NYRB</i>	<i>New York Review of Books</i>
<i>PCP</i>	<i>Pacific Coast Philology</i>
<i>PLL</i>	<i>Papers on Language and Literatures</i>
<i>PoT</i>	<i>Poetics Today</i>

PQ	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
QI	<i>Quaderni d'Italianistica</i>
QRP	<i>Quaderni di Retorica e Poetica</i>
RagL	<i>Il Ragguaglio Librario</i>
RE	<i>Revue d'Esthétique</i>
REI	<i>Revue des Études Italiennes</i>
Ren&R	<i>Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme</i>
RenQ	<i>Renaissance Quarterly</i>
RF	<i>Romanische Forschungen</i>
RivLI	<i>Rivista di Letteratura Italiana</i>
RJ	<i>Romanistisches Jahrbuch</i>
R&L	<i>Religion and Literature</i>
RLI	<i>Rassegna della Letteratura Italiana</i>
RomN	<i>Romance Notes</i>
RomQ	<i>Romance Quarterly</i>
RomS	<i>Romance Studies</i>
RPh	<i>Romance Philology</i>
RR	<i>Romanic Review</i>
RSAA	<i>Rivista di Studi Anglo-Americani</i>
RSItal	<i>Rivista di Studi Italiani</i>
SAC	<i>Studies in the Age of Chaucer: The Yearbook of the New Chaucer Society</i>
SBoc	<i>Studi sul Boccaccio</i>
SCr	<i>Strumenti Critici: Rivista Quadrimestrale di Cultura e Critica Letteraria</i>
SD	<i>Studi Danteschi</i>
SLRev	<i>Stanford Literature Review</i>
SMed	<i>Studi Medievali</i>
SPCT	<i>Studi e Problemi di Critica Testuale</i>
SSF	<i>Studies in Short Fiction</i>
StIL	<i>Studi dell'Istituto Linguistico</i>
StIR	<i>Stanford Italian Review</i>
T&L	<i>Textes et Langages</i>
TLS	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
UeL	<i>Uomini e Libri</i>
VP	<i>Victorian Poetry</i>
WCPMN	<i>Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter</i>
WRM	<i>Wolfenbütteler Renaissance-Mitteilungen</i>
ZRP	<i>Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie</i>

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